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OUR STRUGGLE

SIR RICHARD ACLAND, M.P., has written a book under the title *Unser Kampf (Our Struggle)* with the stress on the *unser* or *our*. It is a bold, fresh piece of writing, expressed in terms easy of understanding by the common man, and quite clearly the work of one who deeply feels the wrongs of our present social system. We shall not be surprised to know that it commands a large circulation. And yet it must at once be said that the kind of community which Sir Richard Acland would wish to raise on the ashes of the present is one which would carry the seeds of its own destruction, for nowhere is there admitted any property rights for the individual citizen. It would, indeed, seem that Sir Richard Acland's new and better world will positively glory in refusal of any such right for we are told that "The world of the future is to common ownership. Only under common ownership can we abolish class distinction, unemployment, inequality and strife. Only under common ownership can we free ourselves from the system which positively encourages every man to seek his own personal advantage here on earth." Not a niche for the private citizen so far as right to any property is concerned. Could any such society possibly endure?

We feel that this attitude to private property rights is the bye-product of a fatal flaw in Sir Richard Acland's economic outlook, to wit his failure to see any distinction between products of industry and free gifts of nature : between labour products and land. Equally with our present social system, Sir Richard's new society treats them as if they were economically one and the same. Had he recognised that these two things utterly differ in their origin and nature and that the values attaching to them also differ fundamentally, the property laws in his new society might have been very different, and might have been framed so as to recognise not only common ownership but also individual ownership, each in its proper sphere. But in this new society there is to be no such recognition. Everything is to be in common ownership, except, quaintly enough, "the clothes you wear," "your furniture, your back garden." No more shall it be said "this is mine," or "this is thine," for all will be "ours."

In none of this is there anything new. It is 100 per cent Communism, though not to be condemned because given that name. *Some* kind of common income, and therefore of communism, every country must have. Shall it be a communism that invades the rights of individuals or a communism that respects them? Shall it be unjust and rapacious or just and beneficent? So the question is where this common income is to come

from and can it be secured for the community without encroaching on the property rights of the individual citizen. We claim that to a certainty a common income of this kind lies awaiting us, ready to be taken if so we will, and we would oppose to Sir Richard's picture of a future where no longer shall men say "mine" or "thine," for all will be "ours," the conception of a more equitable society in which some things will be "mine," some things "thine," and some things "ours."

The real problem presented to us is where to draw the line between these three. To distinguish between things that differ and place them in different categories is the scientific line of approach. We must not lump together things that differ in nature and origin.

Of what, then, can a man claim "this is mine"? Surely that which his labour has produced or that which he has got in free exchange for it. And of what can society as a whole make the claim "this is ours"? Surely that which society as a whole has brought into existence. To discover just what part of the total product is due to individual effort and what part is due to social effort and correspondingly to apportion these parts between individuals and society is to come near solving the social problem from the economic side.

The instinct that "what a man makes is his own," is one of the most deeply seated instincts in human nature, though one which in practice has always been denied, for there have always been and still are, legalized monopolies which rob men of what they make. This elementary instinct in no way clashes with its counterpart that what society produces should be recognised as common property. To satisfy these two elementary requirements of justice would be to build a society combining all that is good in "common ownership" as desired by Sir Richard Acland, with all that is good in individualism.

How then are we in practice justly to apportion wealth between the individual and the community as a whole? How are we to reconcile individual rights with common ownership? The answer is given directly we make a fundamental analysis of how wealth is produced in civilized society. It will then be disclosed that there exists a great and growing fund brought into being and day by day maintained by the presence of the whole community and not by anything the individual does or can do. This great fund comes into being with the community, grows with the community and disappears with the community. It depends on the standard of civilization, rising as it rises, and falling as it falls. As the arts, sciences, powers of production and efficiency of public services rise or fall, so does it rise or fall. In all respects this fund mirrors the productive powers of the community. This fund, the economic rent or value of bare land, purely due to social activity and in all respects unlike the value attaching to labour products, is the social or communal fund par excellence, and is therefore the community's rightful property. The rent of land is the community's rightful share of what is produced, and what remains over after the rent of land is paid to the community is rightful private property.

In one way or other, true doctrine comes to the top and though Sir Richard nowhere explicitly recognizes what is here claimed, he does so by implication in many parts of this book. On pages 53-55, for example, he is quite clear that wages are roughly about the same in

whatever location men work, though in some of the "fields, mines or factories" much more is produced than in others. Though the produce varies, the wages on or in all of them are determined by those paid to workers on or in the least productive. Here Sir Richard has got hold of the margin of production in virtue of which wages to-day always tend to a minimum. But he has got hold of it only indistinctly and obscurely for to rectify this tendency to a minimum he would make common property of all the fields, all the mines, and all the factories and divide the wages earned in them equally among all wage earners, which would mean that those who worked in the most favoured places would receive less than they produced, while those who worked in the less favoured would receive more than they produce.

But is it not clear that the crux of the whole matter lies in varying returns to the same labour yielded by different lands or sites, and that it has nothing to do with the buildings, factories or other improvements? What is true of the yield of labour on these different sites is also true of the buildings and factories. Just as wages are about the same in whatever part of the country, labour is exerted, so the return to investors in buildings, factories, and other improvements is pretty much the same. Which means that the surplus of which Sir Richard is talking—the greater production yielded to the same labour in some places than in others—is simply the rent of land and that the way out is simply to distribute or socialize the rent of land and not the products of labour as he proposes.

Built along these lines, a new society would take shape, in which the apparently conflicting claims of individual and common ownership would be reconciled, for in such a society both the individual and society as a whole would come by all they are entitled to. *Unser Kampf* fails in so far as it ignores nature's communal fund, and so it misses the opportunity of presenting to us a truly equitable society.

W. R. L.

LIBERTY

We speak of Liberty as one thing, and of virtue, wealth, knowledge, invention, national strength and national independence as other things. But of all these, Liberty is the source, the mother, the necessary condition. She is to virtue what light is to colour; to wealth what sunshine is to grain; to knowledge what eyes are to sight. She is the genius of invention, the brawn of national strength, the spirit of national independence. Where Liberty rises, there virtue grows, wealth increases, knowledge expands, invention multiplies human powers, and in strength and spirit the freer nation rises among her neighbours as Saul amid his brethren—taller and fairer. Where Liberty sinks, there virtue fades, wealth diminishes, knowledge is forgotten, invention ceases, and empires once mighty in arms and arts become a helpless prey to freer barbarians! It is not for an abstraction that men have toiled and died: that in every age the witnesses of Liberty have stood forth and the martyrs of Liberty have suffered.—HENRY GEORGE in *Progress and Poverty*.

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