

## Foreword

---

The task to which this book is dedicated is primarily historical. The author sought first to show how land was settled in the United States from early colonial times onward, and against this background to trace the evolution of our present land-tenure system. In pursuing this objective, however, he overstepped the essential bounds of the historian. The story that emerges is faithfully documented, but in the telling, it is enriched by an understanding of economics and philosophy. An example of this is the author's discussion of the various proposals that have been made for the taxation of land, and the probable effect of these proposals upon land use and social development. Much, therefore, of what the reader will find helps to illuminate the larger problem of land tenure throughout the world.

In all history land, as distinct from other property, has played a significant and singular role in human progress. In its evolutionary process landownership has changed from a collective concept wherein absolute title rested with no one individual or group, to a legal status whereby individuals or groups obtained the power to hold, use, transfer and transmit its use and tenure for personal benefit, without regard to public welfare. This upheaval, almost universal in the history of mankind, has been one of the principal sources of the strife, the discontent, the political corruption and the economic ruin which have marked the course of great nations. That the problem has been less serious in the United States than in most other countries of the world is due not only to the comparative youth of our nation, but also to the fact that until recently there has been an abundance of "free land" to be had. The country.

however, is now thoroughly populated. "Free land" is at an end. As Dr. Sakolski emphasizes, "The history of this process, including an understanding of the 'regard' for land and the evolution of the institution of landownership and use in the United States . . . is worthy of study, if for no other reason than that it forms a basis for future trends and may give indications of the need for a new quest for economic justice."

The land question, as yet unsolved even in this blessed nation of ours, still calls for more than passing thought on the part of our leaders, and today Thomas Jefferson's sage dictum, "The small holders are the most precious part of a state," is the inspiration for enlightened legislation in many of our forty-eight states. Marshall Harris, in his excellent work, *The Origin of the Land Tenure System in the United States* (Iowa State College Press, 1953), points out that ". . . more than a dozen states have endeavored to foster home ownership for the common man by exempting small homesteads from a variety of taxes. Intense interest is found in at least one state and among liberal thinkers as to the advisability of following Jefferson's suggestion by increasing real estate taxes on large landholdings, probably in geometrical progression as they become larger." And these examples could be multiplied.

Another illustrious American, Henry George, expounded Jefferson's thought in his classic volume, *Progress and Poverty*. In prose of remarkable power and beauty, he explained the relationship of man to the land, the ownership of which ". . . is the great fundamental fact which ultimately determines the social, the political, and consequently the intellectual and moral condition of a people." And who will challenge him when he says, "And it must be so. For land is the habitation of man, the storehouse upon which he must draw for all his needs, the material to which his labor must be applied for the supply of all his desires. . . . On the land we are born, from it we live, to it we return again—children of the soil as truly as is the blade of grass or the flower of the field."

Reverting again to the current scene, we may cite a resolution (370-1951) adopted by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. This resolution strongly urges its member governments to institute

appropriate measures of land reform in the interest of the landless, as well as the small and medium farmers. How reminiscent of the Jeffersonian ideals, and how timeless the good sense!

In many Eastern countries, and some European nations, too, legislation has been enacted that seeks to vest ownership in the man who tills the soil, and to increase the area owned by subsistence farmers. These are the avenues that these nations hope will lead to more adequate food supplies, more decent standards of living, and the more stable economies which are the most potent guarantees of peace.

We deeply regret that the author of this book, Dr. Aaron Morton Sakolski, is not here to write his own foreword. He met his death in an automobile accident on December 29, 1955, while type for this book was being set. Insofar as we have been able, we have tried to accent those thoughts which we believe were uppermost in his mind.

Dr. Sakolski will be remembered for a previous work on the land question, *The Great American Land Bubble*, published in 1932. That memory, we hope, will be etched more deeply as a result of this posthumously published volume, forthrightly titled *Land Tenure and Land Taxation in America*. If our selection of a title is less colorful than the work deserves, it has the simple virtue of underscoring the author's prime intent, uniting the two subjects, land tenure and land taxation as a means of emphasizing their relationship.

Our most grateful thanks go to Dr. Paul W. Gates of Cornell University, himself the author of many outstanding books on land tenure. It was Dr. Gates who assumed the burden of reading proof, of verifying and standardizing quotations, and of checking Bibliography. Without his skillful and painstaking efforts, the book could not appear in its present carefully documented form.

The Publishers