

# The Clarions of the Battle Call

By Harry Gunnison Brown

It's really the landowners who've done it to us. They are the ones who have clamored, year after year, to get "tax relief for real estate." They are the ones who have supported tobacco taxes and other state and Federal excises, sales taxes, and all the host of burdens on the little we earn by our weariness and sweat. They are the persons because of whose dominating influence on the "liberal" legislators of this "liberal" New Deal era, we have poorer food for our children, poorer and, in the case of some of us, inadequately warm clothing for them, and fewer of the toys and simple amusements which all children everywhere long for.

There's been a lot of talk about "relieving" the poor home owners of taxes. Probably plenty of these have joined in urging the new taxes on those of us who own no homes but pay rent to others so we can have a place to live. But perhaps this is because they don't understand what the new taxes are doing to them and us—consumers.

We're tired of the pretended concern of legislators and of big landowners for the poor home owner. We're tired of the crocodile tears they shed about the home owner's tax burdens. For if they were sincere and had any real comprehension of the problem, they would have to admit that just to abolish taxes on houses and other improvements, while raising the tax rate on the land or site, would give home owners all the relief they can fairly demand; and that this relief would be still greater if taxes were abolished on the goods which home owners—and the rest of us—consume.

If the landowners who are constantly insisting on "tax relief for land" by what they are pleased to call "broadening the tax base," really wanted to aid the poorer home owners, they would not propose, in place of taxation on the small amount of community-produced site values these poorer home owners enjoy, taxes on food, clothing and all or nearly all of

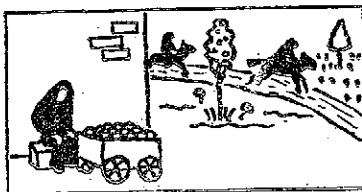
the things that home owners buy. Most of all do the landowner cohorts who keep insisting on low or no taxation of community-produced site values, ignore the welfare of those of us who have no homes but are striving our best to acquire them. For in order that they may enjoy to the full the community-produced annual value of land and sites, they want the revenues of government collected as largely as possible from those who do not own any land. They want increased taxes on the "ability" of the salaried store clerk or the craftsman to earn a living by hard work, lowering the exemption limit on workers' incomes so that larger revenues can be collected from them. They want increased taxes on the expenditures of all workers, both skilled and unskilled. Already, they have succeeded in getting many such taxes levied. Thus, it becomes progressively harder for those of us who have nothing but our labor, to buy or build homes, and many of us never succeed—and can never hope to succeed—in accomplishing this end which our professional well wishers so often say they desire to help us accomplish.

Nor is this all. Untaxing site values makes it easier for speculative holders of vacant lots to hold their lots out of use. Untaxing site values so makes available land comparatively scarce. The sale value of land is made higher both because of speculative holding and because untaxing land leaves owners a larger net rent to capitalize into a high sale value. And the greater salable value of land is certainly a further obstacle in the way of those of us who are ambitious to become home owners.

Crocodile tears for home ownership! Much palaver among radicals about the wicked "capitalists" and

the shortcomings of "the profit system"! Slogans about the importance of "broadening the tax base," when the real thought is to untax community-produced values enjoyed by landowners and to tax instead the necessities of the workers! Slogans about making taxes "conform to the principle of ability," when the thought really is to put more burden on the middle-class white collar worker or skilled craftsman who is able to earn by his labor and skill a trifle more than the unskilled worker, so as to enable landowners to enjoy more of a value that is almost altogether produced by the community! And with it all, this unending talk about the "out-of-dateness" of the view that the community should seek to take in taxation the situation value which it, and not individuals, produces! With it all, remarks intimating that to take for public use location values which are most fabulous in our great cities is an "agrarian" reform of no significance in our largely urban civilization! With it all, too, vague suggestions about the wonderful "liberalism" of politicians and "intellectuals" who are willing to do anything for the workers except what is most necessary for their welfare!

Should most of us have to pay a few of us for situation advantages produced by all of us? Should most of us have to pay billions of dollars a year merely for PERMISSION to work on and to live on the earth in those locations which geological forces and community development have made relatively productive and livable? These are questions that are persistently ignored by the men who assume to be our political leaders. Are they afraid of the political influence of a dominant landowning class! These are questions that are ignored by conservatives. Are they anxious that there be no discussion about them, no awakening of public thought about them! These are questions that are ignored by the "high-brow" magazines and the literary intelligentsia of "liberal" proclivities who contribute to these magazines. Is it that discussion of such questions



does not sufficiently interest their readers to make the discussion pay, while it arouses a more violent opposition from landowners than do vague criticisms of "the profit motive," and that so such criticism butters no literary parsnips!

Behold a question perhaps as fundamental as any about which human beings can take sides, the question whether some of us should have to pay others of us for permission to live on and work on the earth. And it is **THE SUBJECT OF THE GREAT SILENCE**. Politicians will not discuss it, at least not in this land of the free. Landowners must not be offended by proposals that there be too much freedom, such as freedom to use land now held out of use by speculators who don't want to use it themselves, or freedom to live on the earth without paying private individuals for permission to do so. Conservatives, of course, are not interested. But the radical literary intelligentsia and their high-brow magazines also ignore it. Are they, too, afraid of it? If not, why are they silent? Who, in a position of power or influence or prestige, will insist that this be the subject of the great silence no longer? Or can discussion start only among the proletariat?

Are there to be found, anywhere in the United States, men of great wealth, themselves perhaps beneficiaries of the system as it now is, able

to live luxuriously and to accumulate increasing wealth from their absorption of community-produced value, who are yet sufficiently unprejudiced to join wholeheartedly in the fight against the system that enriches them? Are there to be found, anywhere in the United States, men of great wealth who desire neither to mark themselves off from common folk by profuse expenditures and display, nor to distinguish themselves as donors of piles of brick and stone, whether universities, art galleries or research laboratories, to perpetuate their names to posterity, but who can interest themselves in the high adventure of promoting a great reform, though this adventure bring them no honor in their world of fashion, prestige and power? And where can there be found the owner of a great newspaper who will see to it that at least occasionally—say once every week—his paper contains at least one interesting and pointed editorial on this most basic of all economic problems? Or can we who are the victims of this system and the victims of landlord propaganda on tax relief for land, hope for no help whatever—in these days when help is so needed to spread understanding—from the politically powerful, the rich, and the masters of the press? Can serious discussion, even, of reform, begin only among the inconspicuous and the poor?

See: "The Economic Basis Tax Reform," by Harry Gunnison Brown, pp. 105-140.