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## CORRESPONDENCE

### OWNERSHIP AND DEMOCRACY

By Scott Nearing

The present system of land ownership in the United States was justified on the ground that it would serve as the economic background for a true democracy. The very foundation of the American Commonwealth was to be "every man a farm and every farm a man." There was to be no citizen who could not avail himself of this opportunity.

The land was abundant — "exhaustless." — the colonists said. As late as 1832 Henry Clay could say in a discussion on the Public Lands, — "We should rejoice that this bountiful resource (public land) possessed by our country, remains in almost undiminished quantity, notwithstanding so many new and flourishing States have sprung up in the wilderness and so many thousands of families have been accommodated." Later in the same speech he said, regarding the public lands. "They are liberally offered, — in exhaustless quantities, and at moderate prices, enriching individuals and tending to the rapid improvement of the country."

The land seemed exhaustless. Who could dream that the primitive endless forests would one day disappear? That the stream of human life would overflow the continent from shore to shore?

All history was back of the idea of individual land ownership. Whenever a nation grew, in which each man owned his piece of the earth, these individual job-owners had been able to bid defiance to tyranny and oppression. Democracy flourishes wherever there is an economic basis for the independence which each man feels that he has a right to demand, but which he cannot hope to assert so long as another man owns his job.

European feudalism concentrated the ownership of practically all of the land in the hands of the ruling class. The pope, the king, the duke, the prince -- the whole earthly hierarchy of Church and State was built in a way that was calculated to place the economic opportunities which the ownership of agricultural land afforded, in the hands of a small ruling clique. Democracy was impossible under that plan, so our forefathers moved to the United States.

Today, in the United States, the frontier has been reached, and anew, we are creating a small group that owns the economic advantages — the jobs of the country. If that system prevails in the United States, democracy is doomed. It is

impossible to maintain democracy in the absence of its economic basis. Before America can be made safe for democracy, Americans must own the jobs at which they work. Democracy can survive on no other foundation.

Toledo, Ohio. Scott Nearing