

## Getting Down to Fundamentals

\* MAN'S DESIRES ARE never satisfied. All agree that this unremitting urge is the stimulus to progress. The conventional economists limit their discussions of man's desires to the narrow field of material wants. This treatment may be explained by their acceptance of periodic depressions as fixed economic law. A typical comment on the business cycle is quoted from a current text book. "We are here face to face with one of the unsolved problems of economic science, . . . and while some very interesting hypotheses have been announced, it is safe to say that the complete solution of the problem is yet to be found." The "unsolved problem" is a complete failure of understanding of the causes of depressions. It contemplates no such ambitious program as the elimination of them. If we accept depressions as inevitable we must also conclude that a prosperous economy can never be achieved.

George having recognized and expounded the natural laws governing distribution has dared to venture beyond this drab prospect and develop the theme of spiritual desire into the philosophy of freedom. His entire structure has been erected however upon a logical analysis and codification of natural laws.

His disciples and interpreters have not always manifested the same direct approach and intellectual sturdiness. Some have gazed rapturously at the vision of freedom, ignored the foundation upon which it must be reared, and frowned upon the materialism of those who will not do likewise. Some have been content to accept conclusions but have neglected to examine and appraise the clear and unwavering logic supporting those conclusions.

Persuasion from such sources has not always been effective. It has frequently been met with doubts and misunderstanding if not actual hostility. Landlords as individuals and a class have been cast in the role of villains. The fact that a great many if not the majority of people are landlords and victims of the system has not been made clear.

The uninitiated are often given the impression that conspiracy among landowners is the vice in

our present economy and are not impressed sufficiently with the fact that the institution of unrestricted private property in land is the force which automatically works the harm.

It is suggested that land constantly increases in value and land speculators become steadily and uninterruptedly richer through their wanton appropriation of the just shares of labor and capital while casual observation reveals that the periodic stoppage of production leaves nothing and no one unaffected.

Concentration of large landholdings has been singled out for attack although dispersal of ownership but intensifies and speeds stoppage of production. The impression is created that the taxing of land values might destroy the security of possession through failure to point out that that insecurity which is now a constant threat would be replaced by security. The primary importance of a land value tax as a means to counter the strangling effect of speculative rent via production is subordinated to the prospect of finding a productive source of public revenue.

Politicians have been indicted as corrupt and teachers of political economy as dishonest when economic ignorance has been more frequently the fault to be corrected. Appeals have been made to man's "better nature" forgetting that George accepted man as he is and showed that conformity with natural economic laws would afford him the opportunity to develop his highest and noblest potentialities.

It has been remarked that if we understand the laws of rent and wages, realize that increase in land values is unearned increment, that a tax on land values cannot be shifted, and keep in mind the exchangeability of wealth, we cannot for long deviate from sound exposition of the science of political economy. We would then appreciate the broad implications of the statements that if the community collected the economic rent, even if it were tossed into the ocean, our condition would still be improved, and that so long as one acre of land continues to be free the structure of a free economy exists.

—WILLIAM S. O'CONNOR