

The Significance of Site Value

by JOSEPH CARLO

THE central tenet of Henry George that land, as he defined it, was not brought into being by human exertion and therefore is not the legitimate property of the individual since property can only be justified by productive effort, has always been questioned.

The examples of dock facilities, landfills, artificial platforms for off-shore drillings, the increase of land areas in river deltas and their eventual usage for crop production, are cited to refute Henry George and to show that, in many instances, land sites are created by nature, by individuals, or by governments, thus augmenting the supply.

"Site is to be thought of as an immovable extension in space and as a non-material geometric form or figure. This follows clearly from Henry George's reasoning. The surface of the earth, if divided in a gridwork pattern of longitudinal and latitudinal lines, will be seen to be a collection of sites, each covering any extension of area depending on the number of lines drawn. In whatever area or site a landfill is made, a delta is formed, or an off-shore rig is placed, new "land" (as it is understood in its limited, non-Georgian sense) may have been "created," but no new site was formed. Whatever develops within the site, man-made or nature-made, the site cannot be altered because it is non-material and immovable.

If it were possible to enlarge the earth in a balloon-like expansion, then new or larger sites would be created, but in no other way. Any increase in "land areas" would have to involve such extra-terrestrial exploits as space platforms or landings on the moon or other bodies in space. All nature-made bodies in space have a fixed extension of sites (sun or other star-sun flares move into and out of sites). Space platforms can be enlarged, but they are only further examples of the principle that *sites* are to be found throughout space, but are not made by man—he can expand *into* sites but *cannot* create one, and therefore space platforms, as sites, are not legitimate objects of individual ownership.

Our central tenet that no sites are brought into being by human effort is thus shown to be universal. The fact that individual effort in improving land for tillage and building canals and bridges is sometimes indistinguishable from the land itself after years of neglect, is not germane to the argument. Sites have not been augmented or changed. They would remain non-material and eternal even if the earth were blown to bits or atomized.

To pursue the configurations of land sites; lakes, or more scientifically, their geometries, are sites, as are housing extensions built over water and boat-house accommodations. Ocean extensions and their contours are sites when the surface is used by man or when there are drillings in land below the surface. The over-water cities built in Puerto Rico when people were driven off the land are evidence of this.

The 200 mile extension of their borders into the sea by Peru and Ecuador and other South American countries for fishing rights, off-shore oil exploration and under-water soundings, is a manifestation of their practical understanding of site value and the meaning of the term.

All the world is one divisible site, whether the surface is made of ice, barren soil or greenery, sand, or water. Some sites are currently inaccessible or of little use for production or habitation. In the past, as in the Incan civilization on the highlands of Peru, so-called useless sites flourished but are now only memories. Even when jungles have been opened to cultivation no new sites were created.

In an eagle-like view of a mountain site, its boundaries are clear but not its "tiers." In a given mountain site one may find clearings on the top in use, diggings in its interior, and terrace farming on its sides—all on one site. But no part of its extension, *qua* extension, was created by man. Each tier user preempts the use of that tier by others, and therefore must, if the community demands it, pay for the privilege, since the tier was not created by human exertion. But it is not my purpose to pursue this Georgian concept here. Nature gives and takes away. Earthquakes, hurricanes and floods change the face of the land but do not affect sites. Site usage may be altered or discontinued but the site continues to exist.

Islands sometimes emerge within the boundaries of sites but they are merely entities of which we are made aware because of aspects that were always there—not newly made but newly emerging. "Outback" in Australia "new lands" are said to be emerging as new sections are cultivated or mined, but the sites were there since the formation of the earth.

The "substance" (minerals, oil, soil and so on) is only usable if access to sites is permitted. Crossing their boundaries makes possible the use of these material elements. But physicists tell us that "matter" or "substance" is essentially an energy mass—they do not find any "gritty stuff" in the universe. We can infer from this that matter is merely an extension in space and thus we return to our site concept.

"Land value," the familiar term, is justified and indispensable in the larger Georgian concept, but site value is all-inclusive and should be kept in mind, for if clearly understood it leads to a sound thesis and a workable solution to poverty.