

DIALOGUE ON POLITICAL ECONOMY (from page 1)

JACOB BRONOWSKI: Emperors go, but empires remain. And, as Karl Marx might agree, neither he nor Friedrich Engels in The Communist Manifesto [created] the revolutions in Europe; but they gave them the voice. It was the voice of insurrection. Is that not so, Herr Marx?

KARL MARX: Where the working class is not yet far enough advanced in its organization to undertake a decisive campaign against the political power of the ruling classes, it must at any rate be trained for this by continual agitation against, and a hostile attitude toward, the policies of the ruling classes. Otherwise, it remains a plaything in their hands.

MODERATOR: But, many modern societies have embraced the principles of social democracy. John Galbraith has documented this history in his writings. Professor Galbraith, would you care to elaborate?

JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH: [T]he revolutionary uprising Herr Marx embraced had obvious points of vulnerability. There was the threat posed to it by reform, the possibility that the hardships of capitalism would be so mitigated that they would no longer arouse the revolutionary anger of the workers. Liberal reformers in the twentieth century were in step with much of The Communist Manifesto.

MODERATOR: Do you concur, Mr. George?

HENRY GEORGE: Neither the liberal reformers nor those who embraced the perspectives offered by Herr Marx allowed themselves to see that his analysis is materially flawed because he fails to properly distinguish between ownership "classes" which are productive, and therefore advance the progress of society, and those which are non-productive. By its very nature ownership of capital must involve production in order to generate new wealth. Ownership of land, on the other hand, requires no such ownership activity, only the growth of the community.

MODERATOR: Mr. George, some have characterized your program to collect the rent of land for public purposes as socialistic. I wonder whether George Bernard Shaw, who credits hearing you speak with turning him into a social activist, agrees.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: Mr. George does not see that if the State confiscated rent without being prepared to employ it instantly as capital in industry, production would cease and the country be starved.

MODERATOR: My own reading of Henry George indicates he makes a strong distinction between the role of the community versus that of the state. His reform is best left in the hands of the members of each community as this makes sense. What many people have come to fear is the power of corporations. Mr. Durant, I see you would like to join this conversation.

WILL DURANT: I do not relish the control of economic lives by vast corporations. To keep the benefits and check the power of these mastodons I would favor public ownership of natural resources, including the land and all its minerals, fuels, and other subsoil wealth.

MODERATOR: Such proposals are not new, of course. Herr Marx and other communists have argued this case repeatedly. Herr Marx?

KARL MARX: Long before the period of Modern Industry, cooperation and the concentration of the instruments of labor in the hands of a few, gave rise, to great, sudden, and forcible revolutions in the modes of production, and consequentially, in the conditions of existence, and the means of employment of the rural populations.

MODERATOR: I think we all acknowledge how changes in land use from subsistence food production to commercial farming were fostered by the land monopoly described by Henry George and, of course, Adam Smith. Do you challenge the historical record?

KARL MARX: I concede to Mr. George that this contest at first took place more between the large and the small landed proprietors, than between capital and wage-labor, on the other hand, when the laborers are displaced by the instruments of labor, by sheep, horses, etc., in this case force is directly resorted to in the first instance as the prelude to the industrial revolution. The laborers are first driven from the land. Land grabbing on a great scale is the first step in creating a field for the establishment of agriculture on a great scale.

MODERATOR: We cannot turn back the clock to a time before the great enclosures of the commons and the removal of so many millions of peasants from the land. Mr. George, what would you have us do?

HENRY GEORGE: I do not propose either to purchase or to confiscate private property in land. The first would be unjust; the second, needless. Let the individuals who now hold it still retain ... possession of what they are pleased to call their land. Let them buy and sell, and bequeath and devise it. We may safely leave them the shell, if we take the kernel. It is not necessary to confiscate land; it is only necessary to confiscate rent. I take much of this analysis from our great predecessor, Adam Smith.

ADAM SMITH: As soon as the land of any country has all become private property, the landlords, like all other men, love to reap where they never sowed, and demand a rent even for its natural produce, the wood of the forest, the grass of the field, and all the natural fruits of the earth, which, when land was in common, cost the labourer only the trouble of gathering them, come, even to him, to have an additional price fixed upon them. He must give up to the landlord a portion of what his labour either collects or produces.

MODERATOR: Mr. George, for one, challenges the very foundation of law by what is, in effect, a confiscation and redistribution of wealth from producers to non-producers. Is he correct, Mr. Locke?

JOHN LOCKE: Where the land is concerned, we must identify the moral principles attached to our occupancy and use. God, who hath given the world to men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life and convenience. (continued on page 13)