

ON POLITICAL ECONOMY (from page 12)

The earth and all that is therein is given to men for the support and comfort of their being.

MODERATOR: Yes. And, in the case of North America much was made available to a relative few. Do you not agree, John Adams?

JOHN ADAMS: I, too, believe that property in the soil is the natural foundation of power and authority. ...[I]f the lands are held and owned by the people and prevented from drifting into one or a few hands, the true power will rest with the people, and that government will, essentially, be a Democracy, whatever it may be called. Under such a constitution the people will constitute the State.

MODERATOR: The history in Britain is certainly quite different, is it not Mr. Shaw?

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: Very much so. As long as there is plenty of land for everybody private property in land works very well. But this state of things never lasts long with a growing population, because at last all the land gets taken up, and there is none left for the later comers. Mr. Churchill once described our history very similarly.

WINSTON CHURCHILL: It does not matter where you look or what examples you select, you will see that every form of enterprise, every step in material progress, is only undertaken after the land monopolist has skimmed the cream off for himself. And everywhere today the man or the public body that wishes to put land to its highest use is forced to pay a preliminary fine in land values to the man who is putting it to an inferior use, and in some cases to no use at all. All comes back to the land value, and its owner for the time being is able to levy his toll upon all other forms of wealth and upon every form of industry.

MODERATOR: Somehow, this arrangement has not become deeply entrenched but defended even by those who are left out of the economic system. Why would this be the case? Mr. George, your thoughts?

HENRY GEORGE: The long-term effects are best illustrated by the constant existence of speculation where private ownership has been protected by the governing authority. Essentially, the influence of speculation in land in increasing rent is a great fact which cannot be ignored in any complete theory of the description of wealth in progressive countries. It is the force, evolved by material progress, which tends constantly to increase rent in a greater ratio than progress increases production, and thus constantly tends, as material progress goes on and productive power increases, to reduce wages, not relatively, but absolutely.

MODERATOR: And yet, Mr. George, a combination of many factors has improved the living standards for every new generation - despite the concentrated control over land and the existence of land speculation. Still, you predict this cannot continue.

HENRY GEORGE: What has destroyed every previous civilization has been the tendency to the unequal distribution of wealth and power. This same tendency, operating with increasing force, is observable in our civilization today,

showing itself in every progressive community, and with greater intensity the more progressive the community. Surely, George Bernard Shaw appreciates this insight.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: Even long before this happens the best land is all taken up, and later comers find that they can do as well by paying rent for the use of the best land as by owning poorer land themselves, the amount of rent being the difference between the yield of the poorer land and the better. At this point the owners of the best land can let their land; stop working; and live on the rent: that is, on the labor of others, or, as they call it, by owning.

MODERATOR: And, of course, in the process creating an ever more powerful and destructive rentier class. Other than the societal collection of rent, is there any other measure to counter this inevitability? Mr. Locke?

JOHN LOCKE: I have argued that as much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property. He by his labour does, as it were, enclose it from the common. Such private enclosure is limited to conditions where there is still enough and as good left, and more than the yet unprovided could use. Had this proviso been adopted in North America, the future of its citizenry might have been characterized by less conflict and greater harmony. Do you not agree, Mr. Adams?

JOHN ADAMS: The balance of power in a society, accompanies the balance of property in land. The only possible way, then, of preserving the balance of power on the side of equal liberty and public virtue, is to make the acquisition of land easy to every member of society; to make a division of land into small quantities, so that the multitude may be possessed of landed estates. If the multitude is possessed of the balance of real estate, the multitude will take care of the liberty, virtue, and interest of the multitude, in all acts of government.

MODERATOR: That sounds very much like what Thomas Jefferson wrote early on by his vision of a society of self-reliant farmers working the land. Was Jefferson unrealistic, Mr. George?

HENRY GEORGE: It seems to me that those who look upon the small farmers of the United States as forming an impregnable bulwark to private property in land very much miscalculate.

MODERATOR: Time has shown this to be true, Mr. George, as the number of family-owned farms has dwindled in many countries. At the same time agriculture is widely subsidized by price supports and tariffs on imports. Even so, technology has replaced large numbers of farm workers, who migrate to the cities to compete for employment there. Is a full employment society possible, Dr. Adler?

MORTIMER J. ADLER: Can the problem be solved? I think it can. With every technological advance, the increasing productiveness of capital instruments also makes the solution of the problem more feasible.

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