

DIALOGUE ON POLITICAL ECONOMY

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MODERATOR: I take it you are referring to your work with Lewis Kelso on how to turn every worker into an owner of capital.

MORTIMER J. ADLER: That solution is based on principles of economic justice which not only respect property rights but also recognize that each person has a natural human right to participate in the production of wealth through the ownership and application of productive property to a degree sufficient to earn for that person a decent standard of living.

MODERATOR: Even here, with the creation of ESOPs, we have not even slowed the power of rentiers of this world to control the source of what we all need in order to live. There has been only very limited progress toward the form of universal capitalism you and Louis Kelso campaigned for. I think that Henry George would say your proposals fall short of the real problem. Mr. George?

HENRY GEORGE: Until we can discover some way of making something out of nothing there is no possible discovery or invention which can lessen the dependence of labor upon land. And, this being the case, the effect of these labor-saving devices, land being the private property of some, would simply be to increase the proportion of the wealth produced that landowners could demand for the use of their land.

MODERATOR: This is certainly demonstrated in today's property markets. In some of the major cities around the world, the land cost can exceed 50 percent or more of a residence. The dynamic is not new, of course, as Herr Marx can attest to.

KARL MARX: We should note that the capitalized rent, the price of land, now becomes an important aspect; and that not only can the former rent-payer transform himself in this way into an independent peasant proprietor, but also urban and other holders of money can buy plots of land with a view to leasing them either to peasants or to capitalists, and enjoy the rent on their capital thus invested as a form of interest.

MODERATOR: Yes, many of us see investment in land as just one of many ways of securing income. We lease land to actual farmers. We construct buildings offering space for lease to residential or commercial tenants. We might even lease land to someone else to construct a building, charging ground rent. Few of us see this as destructive to our communities. Mr. George.

HENRY GEORGE: If one man owned all the land accessible to any community, he would, of course, demand any price or condition for its use that he saw fit; and, as long as his ownership was acknowledged, the other members of the community would have but death or emigration as the alternative to submission to his terms. This has been the case in many communities; but in the modern form of society, the land is in the hands of too many different persons to permit the price which can be obtained for its use to be fixed by mere caprice or desire.

MODERATOR: While this may continue to be the case for land owned for homeownership, we observe today an ongoing concentrated control over natural resource laden lands by corporate in-

terests. As Frederick Jackson Turner will attest, the ideal of free land and the frontier opportunity is long gone, even if the influence of that era remains.

FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER: In the settlement of America we have to observe how European life entered the continent, and how America modified that life and reacted on Europe. Who shall measure the effect on Europe of free land in America? America has given occasion for a new Migration of the Peoples comparable to the older one.

MODERATOR: Of course, one of history's most studied migrations is that of the people of Ireland to the far corners of the globe. I see Professor Galbraith asking to be recognized.

JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH: Ricardian landlords were also amply present in Ireland - or more often absent in England which was socially much more congenial and frequently also a safer place for a landlord to live. As the Irish population expanded, so did the competition for land and so did the return that was extracted by the absentee landlords. Grain was grown to pay the rent; potatoes were grown to feed the people. Even when people starved, the grain was sold and the rent was paid.

MODERATOR: And, in many parts of the world today people are starving even as agricultural land is reallocated to grow crops for export markets. Mr. George, you toured Ireland extensively and tried to build support for your proposals there. What are your thoughts on the Irish land question?

HENRY GEORGE: To drop a man in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and tell him he is at liberty to walk ashore, would not be more bitter irony than to place a man where all the land is appropriated as the property of other people and to tell him that he is a free man, at liberty to work for himself and to enjoy his own earnings. That is the situation in which our Irishman, and a worker nearly everywhere, finds himself.

MODERATOR: Yes, to be landless in an agrarian society is to live a short and brutish life. This is certainly borne out by history, would you not agree Mr. Durant?

WILL DURANT: We may derive endless instruction from the economic analysis of the past. We observe that the invading barbarians found Rome weak because the agricultural population which had formerly supplied the legions with hardy and patriotic warriors fighting for land had been replaced by slaves laboring listlessly on vast farms owned by one man or a few.

MODERATOR: Are the lessons to be learned by how the land was settled in North America different from those of the Old World, of Europe or Asia, Mr. Turner?

FREDERICK JACKSON TURNER: When we consider the public domain from the point of view of the sale and disposal of the public lands of the United States the story is in sharp contrast with the European system of scientific administration. Efforts to make this domain a source of revenue, and to withhold it from (continued on page 15)