

THEY ARE SCATTERED ACROSS THE UNITED STATES, IN CANADA,
PARTS OF THE CARRIBBEAN AND THE SOUTHERN AMERICAS,
THROUGHOUT MUCH OF EUROPE, EVEN IN SOUTH AFRICA, AUSTRALIA
AND NEW ZEALAND.

This describes the geographical dispersion of a small but significant group of individuals working for peaceful yet dramatic changes in the world's political economy.

Unlike members of better known organizations, these people tend not to sit in the most powerful seats of business, labor or government; however, many are successful in business, academia, journalism, medicine, agribusiness, science and almost any field of endeavor you might name. This diversity is carried into ethnic, religious and racial heritage; as well as across a very diverse political spectrum.

The element of attraction, what brings them together in spirit and action, is a philosophy. Well developed and intellectually challenging, it is a philosophy best described by the words "cooperative individualism", a way of looking at the world that is both uncommon and universal. The force of their philosophy

rests on a recognition of "natural law"; and, what they subscribe to (more or less uniformly as individuals) is traceable to the ideas and writings of one nineteenth century American -- a social and political reformer, economist and philosopher, author of a number of powerful books, (the first of which was and is an enlightening analysis on the human condition and potential).

During the course of the last century, many who read this analysis came to this unique individual to listen and to discuss; and, then, following his death in the last decade of the century, devoted themselves to a cause to which they attached the highest degree of justice. They became activists in the reform movements or political parties of their respective countries and were at the grassroots level of support for legislation adopted to improve the quality of political and social life for the citizens of their own and other nations. A slow, sometimes halting movement to realize the fruits of one man's extraordinary vision has continued ever since.

This initial group of supporters and their successors have fought a very difficult battle against tremendous odds, impeded by powerful interests, interrupted by the passions and pressures of two world wars and, of course, the "Great Depression". In

1932, at the worst moment of the world's economic problems, a few of these individuals decided to shift their effort from the political arena -- where little progress was realistically expected -- to education, in many respects an even more challenging endeavor. A school was founded under the name of their now deceased philosopher friend. Almost immediately efforts were made to expand the school's presence into other cities, both in the United States and abroad. Meanwhile, others established a foundation, the purpose of which was to ensure continued publication of the books, pamphlets, speeches and essays from which their movement now found its voice. A professional research foundation and academic journal on political economy are today part of this effort.

Remarkably, and despite the commitment of lifetimes, this group remains largely unknown to the general public. Their views have been expressed "by invitation" before Congressional committees in the United States and before similar bodies within other national governments (as well as the United Nations). At the school's main educational center have been held countless public forums on the issues of the day, with speakers from all backgrounds and affiliations. But, for the most part, they have yet to reach the everyday citizens throughout the world for whom they have dedicated so much of themselves. They are not dismayed.

Their goal is to move the world toward a truly humanitarian civilization in which individual liberty is maximized within a framework of social cooperation. The changes they work for are designed to reduce international conflict (and, subsequently, the potential for war), promote the virtues of democratic, participatory government, maximize economic growth, solve forever the problem of uncontrolled inflation and -- most importantly -- achieve a major improvement in the standard of well-being for ALL PEOPLE IN ALL SOCIETIES. And at the same time do all this while reducing the amount of government intervention in the daily lives of individuals and businesses, under conditions they by definition describe as the "competitive marketplace" (a state of affairs not present anywhere in the world today). The road to achieving these goals involves casting aside most of the fiscal and monetary policy prescriptions followed in the so-called "social democracies" such as the United States, Canada, West Germany and Japan. Also discarded are the theoretical proposals of Marxist-Leninism or extreme anarchism (one the antithesis of the other -- i.e., total State control versus the dissolution of the State).

Among the numbers of this reform-minded group are included a

sprinkling of professional economists, whose writings tell us that Keynesian demand management programs and other interventionist government measures would have been unnecessary had the world adopted the proposals they, and their predecessors, have made during the course of the early decades of this century. That there would have been no Great Depression and probably not a Second World War is also part of their message. Another possibility they point to is the peaceful cooperation that might have ensued between the United States and Russia, had Russia successfully adopted measures proposed to the Kerensky government prior to the Bolshevik revolution. (An interesting treatment of the very same issues can be found in the 1899 novel by Leo Tolstoi, "Resurrection".) And, yes, others somewhat more philosophic by nature than their economist colleagues have prophesied a swift and bloodless end to totalitarianism such as exists in the Soviet Union or in El Salvador today, to be replaced by a political economy under which repression and injustice would not be tolerated by the people and special interest power would wane under the weight of human progress.

One might reasonably ask how sensible, intelligent people can devote themselves so when the reality of the world political economy moves ever further away from these principles. Are they caught up in an absorbing but unrealizable fantasy?

What they propose is a restructuring of political economy that will once again recognize the natural laws uncovered by our earliest political economists. Discarding the Marxist utopian view of man as a creature of his environment (and, hence, moldable into a solely cooperative being), they acknowledge that man is by nature primarily individualistic and only by nurture, and therefore secondarily, social. As such, they contend that man seeks to satisfy individual desires -- whatever those desires may be, but foremost that of "survival" -- with a MINIMUM amount of effort. This observation about the nature of man has, they say, an impact on the study of human civilization seldom recognized by most scientists.

What this means, they believe, is that in the pursuit of satisfying the desire to survive and, further, to prosper, individuals will by nature normally attempt to monopolize what nature has to offer. Unfortunately for human society, while man has generally recognized that such monopolistic behavior is detrimental to the existence of a just society, monopoly has (by nurture) been permitted to continue and to act as a plague on human civilization in many ways. For example, individuals bound together in families, businesses, political bodies and other

groups consciously and unconsciously attempt to achieve personal and/or collective desires through monopolization. What, in fact, has been the reality of the nation-state (on the whole) but an association of individuals whose actions are to a greater or lesser extent designed to protect "monopolistic" control over a geopolitical location to the exclusion of all others.

Within the nation-state itself various associations of individuals vie for even more specific control over what turns out to be the source of that society's physical wealth (i.e., the land and natural resources located within its territorial control). How successful this attempt is to monopolize location dictates not only the level of production that occurs (by controlling to whom access is given) but how in the main the benefits of that production are distributed as rewards for actual contribution.

So, the basic problem as seen by this group of critics of the world's existing political economy, is how to deal with this natural tendency of all human beings to want to control much more of nature than is reasonably required for individual survival. The difficult task (both intellectually and practically) is, how to achieve the desired end result of a just society without undue

restriction of individual liberty? Here is where an understanding of natural law and its impact on the political economy becomes essential. And this is also where the philosophy under consideration provides the passageway to a just society.

What this group's founder recognized from first-hand experience is that man's tendency to monopolize becomes increasingly problematic as the increase in population closes the world's empty but habitable frontiers. Not that this fact had been previously ignored. The eighteenth century "economists" (Quesnay, Smith and Ricardo) all observed this in their own societies. However, only Quesnay, writing in pre-industrialized France, examined his country's agricultural development and concluded that there was an inherent structural defect in systems of political economy permitting one group of individuals (in his era the landed aristocracy) to monopolize most of what was needed to ensure survival -- land and natural resources. One very important qualitative measurement of whether a society can be called "just", therefore, is the degree of equality of access where land and natural resources are concerned. Additionally, how must one answer the question of where the unborn will live and how are they to acquire the necessities of life. Is justice possible when the land is monopolized by the few?

The early development of political systems the continued existence of which depended upon a tightly controlled and militarily supported State machinery led to the displacement of common property in land with private control (i.e., "license" granted to individuals or to groups by the State based on its enforcement capability). Even more devastating say our group of critics, is that this system is unfortunately still the basis for legal title to land and natural resources throughout the world, enabling small groups of individuals to deny use to all others -- being given what amounts to control over nature (what in economics are commodities of fixed, or inelastic, supply, which results in the "owners" receiving a monopoly license sanctioned by the police power of the state.

Such a monopoly, they say, violates basic human rights and must be brought to an end. Peacefully, incorporating transitional methods, but brought to an end.

One way of doing this has been proposed over and over again. The argument goes as follows. If access to land is necessary for survival, then why not simply divide up all the land evenly among all people? While this sounds simple, the problems inherent in

such a proposal are readily apparent. First of all, land is not all equally productive (and productivity is measurable in different ways depending upon what economists describe as "highest and best use"). Thus, dividing land into equally-sized parcels requires unequal distribution measured by productivity. Then there is the question of who is to decide to whom is given what land. Government? The intervention of government by nature involves an erosion of liberty, and history has made it all too clear that corruption is certain and justice never very well served. Once again, there is the problem of what to do about saving enough land for future generations. This proposal has too many weaknesses to be seriously considered.

The socialists have historically called for "land nationalization" as the answer. The State should be the owner of all the land and natural resources, thereby determining for the whole how land can best be utilized. Our group of reformers argues against this proposal as well because under State ownership a system of individual monopoly is essentially replaced by one of State monopoly -- with even graver consequences to individual liberty and justice.

What, then, is left?

Well, they say, there is one rather simple way to achieve a maximum distribution of land's wealth-producing power while protecting the democratic principle of individual liberty. This alternative first requires acknowledgement of the natural law underlying what gives value (i.e., a price) to land. One need only remember that when land is still part of an untamed frontier, that any individual can take what land is needed for survival. One may claim more than that which is needed, but without support of the police powers of the State the claimant is unlikely to prevent others from using land claimed. Population growth eventually brings an end to the frontier, and as part of man's nurturing he looks to the State to enforce his claims to nature. Thus, the State's emergence is the direct result of concentrated population which, in turn, permits the enforcement of monopolistic practices against large segments of the present and future citizenry. As a result, a few citizens at the center of power gain control of land far in excess of that required to provide the basic necessities for survival. The offspring of these privileged few will have space in which to live and enjoy the wealth produced from land; but what about the offspring of those who are denied access, or those who inmigrate from lands whose productivity has been lost to erosion, drought or volcano? Where will they live and work, and how will they survive?

Forgetting for a moment what constitutes justice, basic survival (certainly a fundamental human right) demands that all humans must share equally in the natural productiveness of the Earth. Since the unequal quality of land and the difficulty of reallocating land to the unborn makes equal distribution impossible, our reformers tell us we must distribute the income from land, the price individuals are willing to pay for monopolistic control over its use. And, since one of the things government does best is to collect taxes, collecting and distributing the monetary representation of land values can be performed by government on behalf of the citizenry. Doing so should be easy. The competitive market -- negotiations between buyers and sellers -- determines price; and, rather than wait until land is sold to collect the capital value, government can collect an annual "tax" equal to the price obtainable annually for its use, what political economy calls its "rental value".

Is justice served?

Well, think what this proposal accomplishes. The value of land is created out of the demand by individuals for its use. Where land is plentiful and population low land will have no price.

Where there is no State to enforce private claims to land, again land will not have a price. Therefore, since all citizens share equally in the creation of land values, justice requires that all citizens share equally in those values. Individual liberty subsequently increases as the end to land monopoly gives back to the individual all that is legitimately produced. In return for the license to exclusively use of land, a rent is paid to society's agent (i.e., the State) and the value of production exceeding that of rent becomes the basis for legitimate private property.

Again. Is justice served?

They say it is. I, too, believe it is. As did the American political economist and philosopher Henry George, whose master work "Progress and Poverty" started this debate in 1879. And, in the preface of his book "The Power In The Land" (1983, by Shephard-Walwyn Ltd., London), British economist Fred Harrison recalls the words of none other than Winston S. Churchill, spoken before the citizens of Edinburgh on July 17, 1909:

"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 who 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. A portion, in some cases the whole, of every benefit which is laborously acquired by the community is represented in the land value, and finds its way automatically into the landlord's pocket."

Is justice served? No, not when land monopoly holds hostage the world's political economy and all those who cannot survive without access to the fruits of nature.

Can justice be served? Yes, if we are willing to listen to a small group of reformers and a voice from the recent past that, despite powerful foes, refuses to be quieted.

Are you listening?

Ed Dodson April 1984