

'A bird without feet' by Lancaster M. Greene

The "inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" was well stated by Thomas Jefferson in the great "Declaration of Independence".

Most people agree with this concept as meaning that ownership of a human being is repugnant. The right of a man to own himself comes from the belief that God created all men as well as creating the planet on which we have our beings. We hold the planet in trust for future generations.

Ownership then devolves upon a person who created a product, and this is the rightful basis of property. This is a law of nature, a decree of the creator. There is written in these laws no recognition of any right save that of labor; and in them is written broadly and clearly the equal right of all men to the use and enjoyment of nature; to apply to her by their exertions, and to receive and possess her reward. He alone may rightfully pass his products to another in exchange.

If production gives the producer the right to exclusive possession and enjoyment then there can rightfully be no exclusive possession and enjoyment of anything not the product of labor. Thus the recognition of private property in land is a wrong, because land is not a product of labor.

When non-producers can claim as rent a portion of the wealth created by producers, the right of the producers to the fruits of their labor is to that extent denied.

What most prevents the realization of the injustice of private property in land is the habit of including all the things that are made the subject of ownership in one category as property. If any distinction is made lawyers draw the line between personal property and "real" estate or things movable and things immovable.

In the beginning, all peoples recognized the common ownership of land — and that private property in land is a usurpation, a creation of force and fraud. However, the original coercion is forgotten as ownership achieves the authority of custom.

For example, a New Yorker purchased a plot of land in New Orleans and asked for the usual title search. It traced the ownership starting with 1804. The buyer asked for a search prior to 1804. The title company replied this was the usual start since the Louisiana Purchase from Napoleon was in 1804. Napoleon's title came by France taking it from Spain by force. Spain acquired it by conquest from the Indians whose title came from God who

created Louisiana.

William W. Porter II, a consulting California geologist and Harvard graduate is very much opposed to "abolition of private property in land" warning that this was stated as a communist objective in the Communist Manifesto of 1875, along with "abolition of private property".

Yet, these are two very different proposals, "abolition of private property" is the ending of liberty, of the right from his creator of a person to himself and his products. This is responsible for all the repression and inefficiency that accompanies interference with free markets in Russia.

The fact that Russia survives and is viable at all is because it takes for society all the rent of land. Mr. Porter fails to see that these two ownership assumptions are very different imperatives at opposite poles in morality, in justice and in practical results. Public collection of land rent offsets the debilitating effect of taking private property and this accounts for Russia's position as one of the two great powers on our planet.

The other "great power" — the U.S. — believes in the "inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" and its free market operates to produce efficiently what our people most desire. This offsets the deterrent effect of the private collection of ground rent of location value rent. This subtraction from our production without quid pro quo in exchange makes our economy creak and suffer inflation and recessions.

Colin Bell, of American Friends Service Committee asks Friends to face squarely the future use or abuse of almost 70% of the earth's surface. He referred to the sea. He said this is the last chance to use the earth's resources for the common weal. But, we should consider in similar fashion the future of the other 30% — the planetary land-mass.

We still think of the land below high tide mark as free land and how this free land can affect wages is illustrated by experience in the Alaskan gold rush so well publicized by the poetry of Robert Service and Jack London. If a man did not strike gold, he might run out of money and have to apply to someone for a job. Competition for work pressed wages down toward mere subsistence.

Then, a man found gold on a beach and claimed it for his own because it was below high water mark much of the time. So many men rushed to the shore to pick-up as much as \$50 of gold daily that employers had to bid at least what men

could pick up on the beach and wages soared.

Eventually a big storm shifted the beach and there was no longer gold to be picked up. Wages fell back to subsistence.

We think of the sea belonging to everyone, but we take the air we breathe for granted. It does not belong to some who may then rent it to others. This is not true of radio or television channels, which have become exclusive and extremely valuable. Political clout or influence may secure these special privileges, as one may witness in the case of former President Lyndon Johnson.

The land of New England was divided by the first settlers, as 12 centuries before their ancestors had divided the land of Britain, giving each head of a family his town lot, and his seed lot while beyond lay the free common. As for the great proprietors, whom the English Kings endeavored to create by letters patent, the settlers saw clearly enough the injustice of the attempted monopoly and made sure that none of these proprietors got much from their grants. The abundance of land, however, prevented attention being called to the monopoly which individual land ownership, even in small tracts must involve when land becomes scarce.

So the great republic adopted in its beginning the institution that ruined the republics of antiquity. The people who proclaimed the inalienable rights of all men to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness accepted a principle which, in denying the equal and inalienable right to the soil, finally denies the equal right to life and liberty.

As each generation holds our planet earth, in trust for succeeding generations their moral imperative to seek justice for all human beings is of the utmost importance. Equal opportunity to use this energy and talent should be the inheritance of every person from the creation.

Failure to recognize this could in the words of an Alaskan Indian be likened to a bird without feet. Crows sleep clinging to branches. A sleet storm in the night may freeze the feet to a branch. A crow may be impatient to fly off next morning and in the struggle tear away his feet. His wings are still strong and his beak might tear at meat, but without his feet, he cannot hold it and is unable to eat. A bird without feet is a sad and pitiful creature and can be likened to any country that doesn't understand just ownership.

[This is one of the papers submitted at the 1974 Henry George School Conference at Goleta, California.] □