

MAGNA CARTA - THE UGLY TRUTH

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If we want to discover where modern European civilisation went wrong, one of the places to look for clues is this field because, in the thirteenth century a king met his barons and knights in a field along the river Thames near Windsor Castle and struck a deal. That deal is now known as Magna Carta. It's treated as a sacred document. It's supposed to be the cornerstone of the liberty of the individual. The ugly truth is terrible to behold.

Magna Carta was the beginning of the end of the liberties of people born on the British Isles. Because it was here, in Runnymede, that the knights and the barons persuaded the king to begin a centuries-long process of de-socialising the rents of the land of the kingdom. Now why is that significant? The state was supposed to protect every person in the territory. The rents were there to support the state to ensure that the liberties of every man and woman and child in England were protected. Everybody treated equally under natural right law.

Well, the feudal aristocracy, the barons and the knights, were public servants. They held land from the king on one condition, that they served the state, principally to defend the realm, provide the foot soldiers and the equipment against foreign aggressors, and to administer law and order in their local domains. But those barons and knights knew that theirs was a precarious arrangement because, if the function of the army and the civil service and the law enforcers were to be professionalised, if people were to be paid out of the public purse directly to fulfil those functions, then they, the knights and barons, would lose their social function, which means they would lose their right to receive the rents from the land of their estates. They would be an obsolete class.

And that's what happened at the dawn of the modern European state. Kings decided it was more efficient to create professional armies, to have judges who were paid to go on circuit to enforce the law, to have paid civil servants. The aristocracy were one day going to be made redundant, but when that day occurred they wouldn't care because the rents of the kingdom were going into their pockets thanks to the deal that was originated in these fields.

Now, in the celebrations on the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta, none of this will be explained to people in general because the people who control our society want to preserve the myth that our laws actually protect the human rights of the individual. Look at the sacred documents that are supposed to protect our interests. Go back to America and the revolution and the documents, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. Examine those documents and what do you find?

Well, the Founding Fathers said that their legal documents would be based on the natural rights philosophy. Now, their favourite philosopher was John Locke, who had articulated the trilogy of rights of the individual, *Life, liberty and estate*. Now that word estate meant land, it's the old English term for land. Liberty and life were contingent on having the natural right of access to land.

But the plantation owners of Virginia and Carolina, who had left the English shores to carve out their big estates in the New World, they weren't going to share the right of land with any comers from Europe. They weren't going to have the right to access land enshrined in their sacred documents, so they excluded it. So, anybody landing on the shores in New York seeking land of freedom, were told that they, sure enough had the right to life and liberty, but in place of land what they had the right to was the pursuit of happiness, *Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness*. The plantation owners had erased the right to land from their documents.

And the same thing happened in the twentieth century, when the United Nations published their Universal Declaration of Human Rights, when Europe published its European Convention on Human Rights, what do we find? The individual has the right to everything under the sun except for the right, the equal right, the natural right of access to land. Now what's the significance of that? Well, quite obviously in the modern period we can't just literally carve up the land and give an equal portion to everybody. That's not practical in the modern economy. Most of us don't want to work on the land as farmers. We want sufficient land in the towns to live and work on. But we all have an equal right to the riches of our land.

Now, that can only be expressed by giving everybody an equal right of access to the rents of the land, those rents being created by all of us. Those rents reflect the value of the natural resources of our territory and the value created by our communities. So the practical resolution for giving everybody equal right of access to land is equal right of access to the rents of land. But that's what the barons and knights, back in 1215, made sure would not happen. Because they began the process of privatising those rents by de-socialising them, by eroding the social status of rent. And enabling them to pocket the rents without having the obligation to serve the community. As a consequence, the individuals who were born after the sixteenth century were dispossessed of the land physically by the enclosures. And they didn't have the right of access to the rents being spent through the public purse. Instead, the landlords in Parliament were now taxing the wages of the workers so that they could run down the revenue collected by the land tax. So by the nineteenth century the land tax raised approximately three percent or four percent of the rents of the kingdom directly. In their place they imposed the salt tax, the beer tax, all the taxes on working people, so that the aristocracy, the gentry and their hangers-on, like the lawyers and the people who administered the estates like the surveyors, they shared in the rents of the kingdom and allowed the peasants to carry the burden of taxes.

None of this will be discussed during the commemoration of Magna Carta, but what we now discover, looking closely at what happened in this field in 1215, was that the liberties of the individual, far from being enshrined in that document, began to be eroded when the king signed Magna Carta under the trees in Runnymede. ■