

SYMPOSIUM  
ON  
THE LAND QUESTION.

BY

AUBERON HERBERT.	WORDSWORTH DONISTHORPE.
SYDNEY OLIVIER.	J. C. SPENCE.
ROBERT SCOTT MOFFAT.	MICHAEL FLÜRSCHHEIM.
LIEUT.-COL. W. L. R. SCOTT.	HERBERT SPENCER.
HENRY W. LEY.	J. B. LAWRENCE.

EDITED BY

J. H. LEVY,

*Late Lecturer on Logic and Economics at the Birkbeck Institution  
and the City of London College.*

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## XI.—BY AUBERON HERBERT.

### REPLY.

**I** PROPOSE to touch on some important points; others I must regretfully pass by.

Mr. Olivier objects to "*à priori* deductions from notions of abstract right." I hardly understand how he is going to get through the world without them. Clearly he does not get through his article without them. When he maintains that the increased value, given to land by the presence of a community on it, entitles the community to "grab" that increased value, he is using the very weapon he condemns. When he says that these abstract notions lead to different conclusions according to the mind of the writer, and proposes to substitute utilitarian and historical reasoning (both excellent methods in their own place), he forgets that the weakness of the former method is the impossibility of arriving at any conclusion which will command general assent—men being hopelessly divided as to what is good and useful; and that the weakness of the latter is, that when separated from moral considerations, it is a very insufficient guide. Unless you have some abstract good before your mind towards which, as you believe, the human race is travelling, or ought to travel, any historical statement (which itself will generally admit of very large discussion) that we have gone from Communism to Individualism, or from Individualism to Communism, is not of very great importance. The working of evolution is of enormous importance, if you believe that it is tending towards some definite end, but of slight importance, if you do not.

Mr. Olivier questions—if he does not deny—the right of the individual over his own faculties. But in doing it he commits logical suicide. For if the individual has no rights over his own faculties, and no claim to property arising from such rights, neither can that *congeries* of individuals, called the community, have any such rights. If the individual may not claim any increased value in the world's material on account of his faculties, then the mass of individuals, called the community, is necessarily under the same disqualification. Mr. Olivier has destroyed at one fell swoop all the claims that have been hitherto advanced by his party on behalf of

the right of the community to seize increased value, on the ground that it is they, the community, who have helped to create it.

Mr. Olivier must pardon me a minute's amusement at the line he takes. He objects to my appeal to abstract rights on behalf of the individual, and then betakes himself to a much less legitimate use of abstraction,—I mean the recognition of rights, as regards the use of faculties, in the mass of individuals. A man has no rights, but a million of men have. Clearly Mr. Olivier thinks that if you multiply a stone by a million, it will at the end of the process be something different from a million stones. Strong believer as I am in abstract reasoning, I can assure Mr. Olivier I have never indulged myself in such a magical use of abstract notions.

And what a theory—itsself an *à priori* notion—is this theory that those who indirectly, unconsciously, and unintentionally, help to impart value to what another man possesses, may claim that value! If the theory is good for anything, it should be applied generally to the circumstances of life. If I help to make a tradesman's income by buying his goods, I may claim part of his income. If I go to an hotel at a busy season, and help to raise the price of hotel accommodation, I may make a claim upon the landlord in consequence. If I buy and read an author's books, I ought to share in the profits. If two nations trade together, each may send a bill in to the other for increased prosperity. But, as a matter of fact, is it the community, as an entire whole, which does impart the increased value to either houses or land? Is it not the labour, the enterprise, the skill of certain members which impart the largest part of the value, whilst other members of a community, by their ways of going on, actually deduct from the value rather than impart to it? Under what rule of equity are you going to place these two classes on the same footing,—the man who has added, and the man who has deducted rather than added? If it is true that we may claim in regard to the indirect effect of our actions, then I say that Mr. Olivier must find some tribunal or process for estimating the nature and amount of the indirect effect of each man's actions, for we certainly do not all act in the same manner.

Lt.-Col. Scott, amongst other criticisms, seems to ask why should not land be common property, as sea and air are common property? The great distinction is overlooked. In the one case (land) the particles remain, being fixed *in situ*. They, the land particles, can be treated as property, just

because they do not change. The air and sea particles are not property, just because they are ever changing. You cannot identify the air and water particles for they are in a constant state of flux. You can identify the soil particles, for they remain within the four corners of your field, and are modified by your treatment of them. A great deal more can be said; but the necessity of treating the *same* particles of soil according to long continued processes—extending over years—essentially separates land from sea or air.

Lt.-Col. Scott goes back to the favourite topic that land was taken for the people; and that the present holders hold because they are descendants of the successful invading chiefs or nobles. That argument conveniently passes by the fact that a very large part of the land has passed by free sale from the families of the chiefs to others who have purchased; and secondly, that if land was taken from Saxon by Norman, it had been previously taken by Saxon from Briton, and by Briton from the long-headed race. The ancient history therefore to which he appeals gives no true title for another taking of the land, since it discloses no true previous title existing anywhere. If property has been stolen, and restitution has to be made, you must be able to show the person from whom it has been stolen, and to whom it is to be restored.

Mr. Ley seems to me to avoid the mistake, into which Mr. George has led so many people, of building up a right, and then, when it has served its purpose, quietly knocking the poor thing on its head. Every individual, contends Mr. Ley, has an abstract right to a place to-be-in, and to use. Very good; then he ought to have that right conceded to him. Either all land ought to be free for all purposes to all, which is pretty far on the road to absurdity; or every person ought to have his share, whatever it may be—say an acre—which is also a proposition tending in the same direction. I can hardly think Mr. Ley is prepared—though he talks a little vaguely about five acres in one place—to take this last step. Conceive the dislocation of existing things; the roads to be made (and paid for by whom?); the creation of an enormous mass of small holders, fit or unfit; the capital required for building cottages; the complaints of the ever-increasing population who had not shared in the distribution. But if Mr. Ley does not mean that, what does he mean? Will he, too, in common with Mr. George, commute a right? Will he tell a landless man that he, as an individual, has a right to a place to-be-in (and he quietly says, as if we were all Irishmen met to make “bulls,” “without which he

cannot exist " though he is in existence and as large as life all the time ) ; and having said that, will he proceed not to give him his place to-be-in ;—which we can all see to be an impossibility—but to give him a share in a free library, or a bad gratuitous education, or some other blessed contrivance of somebody's, which we are to ask him to take in exchange for his right—a right of such peculiar nature, that whilst society is to be revolutionized in its name, it cannot by any possibility be granted to everybody, or even to half everybody, as the Irishman said. By what authority, I ask, can we commute a right ? If a man, in real sober earnest, has a right to an acre of land, treat that right as a sacred thing, and concede it, whatever it costs you. If it is not a real right, but simply a piece of brain-cobweb, do not play with it and make it an excuse for transferring an enormous money-value from one set of holders to another set. Better do your transference simply by naked force, and use no fine words about it.

I confess, however, that I am puzzled by Mr. Ley's doctrine, because one part seems to conflict with another. He says that the land belongs to nobody. But then, how am I to accept the statement that the individual has a right to a place to-be-in, if it is true that the land belongs to nobody ? If it belongs to nobody, I am obliged to ask not only how can any person rightly have a place to-be-in ; but how can we come to any arrangement in the matter ? How are we to assign it, or let it, or tax it, or cultivate it, or have anything to do with it ? All these things imply a right of disposing of it, according to our own ideas of fitness ; and how, if it does not belong to us, if we have no right over it, can we do anything of the sort with it ? Such a proposition makes us all equal intruders and usurpers one with another.

Mr. Ley says the leg of mutton or sack of wheat grown from the soil may be private property, but the land cannot ; because the forces which produced the sack of wheat were set in motion by an individual, but the forces which produced the land were not. But is it so ? As regards the soil, have not the forces often been set in motion—I use the phrase protesting against it—by men ? Much of the soil which is used for production actually owes as much to man's intervention as does the sack of wheat. When soil is carried up the mountain side to form vineyards ; where tracts of sand are by slow processes reclaimed ; when forests are cleared ; swamps drained ; and years of careful treatment given to land to put good heart into it, the soil is not simply the soil of nature, but also of the art and manufacture of

men. In all such cases the difference between the soil itself, and the produce raised from it becomes of a very shadowy nature. It is true that in all cases Nature is the great producer, and man's share is comparatively small; but it must be conceded that the difference is but slight, where Nature has changed the grains of corn into a sack of corn, or where she has ground down the rocks and deposited the detritus under water to form soil. Such a difference is of far too unsubstantial a character to build upon, and to justify the tremendous dogma that land belongs to nobody, because man did not help to grind down the rocks; but that all the produce of land belongs to him because he has sown the seed, leaving Nature to form the plant. The whole thing is metaphysical and abstract in the extreme. All that I can do in any case as regards nature is, with more or less skill, to avail myself of existing forces and existing materials; and if I have no right to own what already exists in nature, I can never own the sack of wheat any more than I can own the acre of soil. But when we pass to the further applications of Mr. Ley's scheme, I feel, and I presume others do, more away than ever from solid footing. He and Mr. Wallace seem to have arrived together at a small plan by which the world is to be easily and comfortably housed. Some persons are to build houses, and others to live in them. No rent is to be paid, because to charge rent is to charge for space, which is a natural product; though the value of the wall-material, &c., may be paid for. Now what difference the air-space makes, I cannot see. A tenant is not charged now, I suspect, for air-space, but for interest on value of building site, and cost of materials, etc. Under Mr. Ley's plan he would still have to pay these charges. Only Mr. Ley proposes that he should pay it all in one payment and not as rent. Certainly, if convenient to both parties; but I am afraid in a good many cases, if the week's lodging could not be had without payment of the capital sum, a good many people might sleep in the open-air. But in truth I suppose it is only a part of that favourite plan of transferring property by force, which is always doomed sooner or later to defeat itself. Either Mr. Ley intends to deduct something from the property of the house-owner and house builder, or he does not. If he does, it may very likely result in houses not being built. If he does not, who has profited?

My friend Mr. Wordsworth Donisthorpe raises an old quarrel with me. There are no natural (or abstract) rights, he says. To which I can only answer that he can no more

escape from abstract rights than Mr. Olivier can escape from deductive reasoning. To deny such rights is to be involved straightway in logical contradictions. You say that the individual has no abstract right, and in the same breath, and as a resulting consequence, you say that the majority has a right to do what it likes. Its rights extend, says Mr. Donisthorpe benignantly, to the manufacture of landlord oleomargarine. Why, what strange logical process is here? A. has no rights, but one hundred A.'s have unlimited rights. Merciful Heaven! What a transformation! By simply multiplying A. you have transformed him from a being without rights to a being with unlimited rights!

Does it make matters any better if you say bluntly, "Force is Right." (As I have put them both on the same footing, I hope Mr. Donisthorpe will not object to the capital letters.) I, too, try to cling to fact; and I say, as a matter of fact, they are not the same. Ever since man differentiated from animal (if that great guess is true) reason and force have been differentiating from each other, until force, from being its own unconditioned master, seems to be slowly becoming the servant of reason. You may say that is an eternal struggle between the two, and that sometimes force enlists and enchains reason on its side; sometimes reason enlists and enchains force. That is true; but the fact that the struggle exists is sufficient to show that the two forces have separate individualities and are not one.

About the word itself I will not dispute with my friend. If instead of calling them rights he should like to call them "the higher and more remote conveniences" that will not change their nature. They are what they are, because of a universal element in their nature; because of their essential connection with fundamental facts of human nature; because of their conformity with our reason, which has its own imperative needs for satisfaction, as much as our body has; and if you could once get rid of this idea of rights, and take your stand upon the proposition that every man might do just whatever he liked, so far as he had, either singly, or in conjunction with others, the force to do it, you would have, I think, to abandon all use of such words, as just and unjust, equitable and inequitable, tolerant and oppressive, reasonable and violent, and to recreate a large part both of our language and ideas.

I regret that Mr. Flürscheim was irritated with me. Had he not been so, he would have seen the difference between the State and a Joint-Stock Company. I join the latter at my own option, and only submit myself to the will of the

majority because I individually desire to do so. With the State I have no such option. It forces the will of the majority upon me at point after point, whether I wish it or not. As regards the rest of his paper, Mr. Flürscheim must forgive me for saying that he has planted a seed and produced from it a growth as wonderful as did Jack the Giant-Killer from his bean in our nursery legends. If I understand him rightly, the fact of A. and B. paying their rents for land to the State and not to the landlord will lead to the abolition of all payment of interest. I might ask him why we do not see any fulfilment of his prophecy in India, where rents are paid to the State; but I prefer to rest upon the simple fact that as long as one man wants what another possesses, he will give some equivalent,—call it by what name you like. If £100 can produce £101, there will always be an inducement for the capable man to borrow 100 from the less capable, and to pay some equivalent for the advantage; when £100 ceases to produce £101 in capable hands, the world will be in such a bad case that we need not consider what will happen. This profitable use of capital in the more capable hands I look upon as an unalterable fact that cannot be got rid of; and it will always produce its consequences. It should not for a moment be mixed up with the possibility that some persons might be willing, as to a certain extent men now do with their bankers, deposit money without receiving interest, because they prefer absolute safety or convenience to increase. But granting for a moment that interest at some future time might cease, why will the transference of land-rent from the individual to the State bring about this tremendous change? Why should not A. borrow money for the very purpose of hiring land from the State, or to stock it, or build on it? Supposing no capitalist could invest in land; what serious difference would it make as regards the fact of his investing in other forms of wealth? The income of the land is very small, in this country at least, as compared with the income arising from other forms of property; and can any man suppose that after Government had grabbed the land, men would cease to invest in mills, machinery, buildings, ships, and all the rest of it? To say that because you could no longer put your money in one of the safer forms of investment, which, as far as the investing market goes, is of a subordinate and unimportant character, that as a consequence of this, capital will grow so plentiful that men will cease to be able to invest it for interest, and will be grateful to lend it to any person who will return it eventually to them undiminished,



is a statement that it is as impossible to criticise as my saying that discussion in the *Personal Rights Journal* will create a social revolution in Jupiter. Perhaps it may ; but it is the proofs of such a statement that I should have liked to have seen, and those I cannot discover in Mr. Flürscheim's paper.

Mr. Flürscheim separates a mortgage from other productive investments of capital. It is difficult to follow him. If I own a cotton mill and mortgage it for £20,000 in order to develop my business ; where is the economic difference between the lending by the mortgagee to me of this sum, or of his investing it himself in a cotton spinning company ? You may say that the mortgagee has to pay tribute—if you are amused by using such words—but why should he not, since this was the only way of his making a profit for himself ?

Mr. Lawrence challenges me to give the basis for private ownership in land. It is as follows :—Each man owns and possesses his own faculties. He therefore rightly owns what he has produced by means of his faculties, provided only he has exercised his faculties under a general system which allows all others to exercise their faculties.\* Now, if each man owns his own faculties, he may not only use his faculties to produce directly for himself, but he may lend his faculties to others on such terms as may be agreed between them, or hire the faculties of others, or purchase or sell the product of such faculties ; in other words, the ownership by each man of his own faculties means the establishment of the open market for everything, since it is only in the open market that faculties and products of faculties can find their true value. If then the open market results from the ownership of faculties, why is land to be

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\* *Note.*—It is important to distinguish between the universal freedom of exercising faculties and the right of using the material on which the exercise of faculties depends. They are quite distinct, though in discussion some Socialists love to mix them up. In practice, what the State-Socialist does, is to suppress the first, which is the great natural inalienable right of men, on the promise of supplying the latter. Unfortunately, this promise cannot be kept. It only requires a careful examination of all State-Socialism to see that the larger the rights given to the State, the lesser must be the rights remaining to the individual. When all the implements and material of production are State-owned, the individual is at once shut off from any choice or selection as regards the exercising of his faculties and the possessing of the material on which they are exercised. Such opportunities as he may be allowed to possess cannot be won by himself or selected by himself, but are simply conceded in quantity and quality according to the mind of the ruling authority.

the one solitary exception as regards the selling and the purchasing capacities of men? The soil and the sack of wheat cannot be shown to differ in essence from each other; and we can only ask what fetish is this which men set up in the shape of land, placing it above human faculties, and declaring, with a revival of the mediæval and metaphysical spirit, that there is some special sacro-sanct quality about it, so that it cannot be sold or owned?

For what does anything exist in this human world of ours but as the creature of human faculties? And is it not mere rank superstition to hold that by locking up land in the hands of the incapable State, denying to hundreds of thousands of the fittest men the happiness and security of ownership, bewildering us all with those violent changes in management, which always accompany State-ownership, shaking all sense of honesty and security by taking that which it is impossible for the State to pay for at its real value, and inflicting on us all another new and most widely extended system of officialism—is it not, I ask, a mere superstition to hold, as the State-worshippers do, that such a change will act straightway in the nature of a charm upon men, unlocking capital, exorcising poverty, and setting rivers of milk and honey flowing through our midst? The truth is that men are just as ready today to fall down on their knees before Mumbo-Jumbo—slightly altered with a coat of modern paint—and to believe in hocus-pocus as they were in the old days. Our superstitions only change their form; and the State now-a-days has the same crowd, shouting and hoping and praising, as that which kissed the toe of St. Peter's statue, and wore away the pavement with their knees.

As regards our Editor's statement in his "Outcome of Individualism" (pp. 27-8), it is refreshing to find him put his foot firmly and manfully down as regards the modern finely-spun ethics of expropriation. "Have you not had the land long enough," quotes Mr. Flürscheim—a remark which in no case has any application to the recent buyer—without seeing that the Socialist is waiting to make exactly the same remark to him as regards the shares he holds in a joint stock company. As I have often said, I understand the expropriation of the State-Socialist. The State-Socialist platform, that "Nobody has a right to anything, and therefore one somebody has a right to expropriate another somebody and take his place as possessor" may have its failings as logic, yet has the great merit of consistency. But to play at expropriation, like Mr. George and his followers, to be moral and virtuous during one portion of the day over the

rights of property, and the other half of the day to advocate the expropriation of a class, some of whom hold by free purchase, some of whom hold, as it is said, in virtue of an ancient act of force,—which, if it is to be condemned, carries surely and certainly with it the condemnation of the new expropriation—this seems to me simply one more example of that skilful cultivation of fog within one's own mind that has become such a fine art with our modern politicians. Mr. George seems to be one of those happily constituted men who thinks that expropriation is a patent safety process, which he can pull out of his pocket when he likes, and quietly put back again when he likes. There is a Hindoo story of a philosopher who, to show his power, undertook to call the dead bones of a tiger back into life. The experiment succeeded admirably. There was neither hitch nor flaw; only when the tiger was fully alive, the first thing it did was to eat up the philosopher. Should Mr. George be finally gobbled up by his own philosophy,—whatever regret there may be for him or for ourselves—there will be, it must be confessed, some amusement also.

I have said enough to show that I cannot agree with our Editor's remark, that "to be free we require not only the use of our faculties but something on which to use them."\* As mere soil would hardly help the larger number

\* *Outcome of Individualism*, p. 27. The whole passage is as follows:—"I have thus dealt with wages and interest under Individualism. What about rent?"

"What is rent? Let me quote some of the economists. 'Rent,' says Adam Smith, 'may be considered as the produce of *those powers of nature*, the use of which the landlord lends to the farmer.'—(*Wealth of Nations*, McCulloch's Ed., p. 161.)

"'Rent,' says Ricardo, 'is that portion of the produce of the earth, which is paid to the landlord for the use of the original . . . powers of the soil.'—(*Ricardo's Works*, McCulloch's Ed., p. 34.)

"'Wages and profits,' says Senior, 'are the creation of man. They are the recompense for the sacrifice made, in the one case of ease; in the other of immediate enjoyment. But a considerable part of the produce of every country is the recompense of no sacrifice; is received by those who neither labour nor put by, but merely hold out their hands to accept the offerings of the rest of the community.'—(*Political Economy*, 6th Ed., p. 87.)

"Now, to go no further than these quotations, it is evident that rent, properly so called, stands upon an altogether different footing from interest and wages. As an item of private incomes, it rests on private property in land. But this, I contend, is an unjustifiable institution. Land in the economic sense—that is, the raw material of the globe—no man made or can make. He can make improvements in it, and this is all he can do. Those improvements are his

of men and women to use their faculties, the argument necessarily involves much more—not merely soil, but the products of soil. In truth my friend unconsciously slips into the Socialist position. But the Socialist position is itself but a mere mirage of the imagination. There is no conceivable plan by which you can give men the materials which are needed for the use of their faculties. Seizing the materials of the world, putting them under a State lock and key, and doling out certain portions of them, according to the judgment of the few, who govern on a sublimed workhouse system, is certainly not giving the individual access to the world's material. It is easy to see that, under such a system, when once perfected, the individual (even if he absolutely owned the clothes on his back, about which there is a serious question,—for evidently there would be a State row if he had sold them or destroyed them, and therefore could not make his appearance at the proper hour of work in the State factory) could not raise a brick or turn a sod, or do a day's work with any materials and any tools, without first obtaining State permission. Can it then be claimed in any true sense, that the individual would have access to the world's material? If the State-Socialist wishes to state quite exactly what he offers to the world, he should say, "I propose to confiscate all the world-material; place it under State custody; and dole out to individuals such portions of it in such manner, and under such regulations, in return for their compulsory labour, as the State thinks fit." This is a really true

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by right of his labour embodied in them. He must, therefore, be allowed possession of that land or material sufficiently long to enable him to get his crop off of it—using the term 'crop' in the widest sense. Farther than this, however, he has no moral claim to it. It is no outcome of his energies. It is the gift of nature, not to him alone, nor even to his generation. It is the inheritance of the human race, and all he is entitled to is an equal right to use it with others. If more than this be conceded to him, it can only be at the expense of injustice to his fellows. This injustice reaches its climax when persons are allowed to possess far more than their share of the land, as previously defined, not for the purpose of using it productively, but to be periodically bought off by their less favoured fellow-citizens.

"Private property in land—apart from improvements—is essentially inconsistent with Individualism. To be free, we require, not only the use of our faculties, but something on which to use them; and they are mocked, whether they know it or not, who are told they have freedom while all access to the raw material, without which they can produce nothing, is barred to them by a privileged few. Their liberty, under such circumstances, is that of a bird to fly in a vacuum."—ED.

description of State Socialism, stripped of all imaginative colouring. How under such a system, or how under a system of land nationalization, the ordinary individual is going to pass, as a matter of every-day life, into possession of the world's material, to use it in his own fashion and after his own likings—which is the only true means of developing his faculties—has not been explained, and never can be. Apart from the free market there is no free use of faculties, but only the regulation of the faculties of some by the faculties of others. Whatever follies men may be persuaded to indulge in at the present moment, the free and open market in everything is the gaol which lies before the human race.

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