

Land and Freedom

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Current Comment

WE cite the following from a recent issue of the *New Republic*:

In the *New Republic* of April 22 appeared the sentences: "There is enormous waste in production and distribution. If it were eliminated, production per man could be increased, there would be more goods to go around, and prices could be lowered or wages raised or both." Mr. Bolton Hall writes us, "Would prices of land be lowered? I hardly suppose you will answer this awkward question." We find the question not awkward, but somewhat irrelevant. Increased productivity of consumers' goods or of capital equipment probably would not lower prices of land, at least directly. On the other hand there is little quantitative evidence, so far as we know, to prove what seems to be the implication of the question—that landowners would inevitably absorb all the benefits of increased productivity. There is indeed a danger that owners of both land and capital would get more than their share, and to obviate this danger we suggested collective bargaining as well as "a social strategy to plan the best use of the surplus created." To the many Single Taxers who write us every time an economic question is touched in our pages we give the assurance that such strategy might easily, in our opinion, include high taxes on land values, if scientifically levied. But it would also include many other things. Our quarrel with the Single Taxers is not that we deny the truth of their theory, but that we recognize other truths.

THE contention of Mr. Hall and those who believe with him, is not that landlords absorb *all* the benefits of increased production, but that as landlords they are not entitled to reap any of it, and that under present conditions they must continue to absorb what rightfully belongs to capital and labor. "Cooperative bargaining" will not remedy this injustice, and "a social strategy to plan the best use of the surplus created" (i e, wealth arising from increased productivity) are just meaningless words. There is nothing that can properly be called a "surplus;" there are wages to labor and interest to capital. Increased productivity is not "surplus" but more wealth that should go to labor and capital because of increased production due to their own exertion. There is no danger at all that "land and capital would get more than their share," since that share under conditions where the economic rent of land was taken for public purposes would be just what capital could earn for itself (in association with labor) and what land is worth for use.

ANYTHING at all would be more than landlord's fair "share," for he is entitled to nothing. If the *New*

Republic had courage enough to face the problem squarely it would be forced to admit that the landowner is a wholly useless member of society; that what he takes is the rent of land which he does nothing to create, save as a member of the community, and that his uninvited presence as one of the parties to the distribution of wealth is what really bedevils the situation. To talk of "collective bargaining" with one of those concerned in a position to determine the terms of the bargain—contributing nothing yet exacting continuous tribute—is to confuse the real factors in the distribution of wealth.

AS Henry George has said: "For labor cannot produce without the use of land, the denial of the equal right to the use of land is necessarily the denial of the right of labor to its produce. If one can command the land upon which others must labor, he can appropriate the produce of their labor as the price of his permission to labor." To correct this condition collective bargaining will not suffice; the only "social strategy" worth talking about is the adoption of the necessary legislation to put an end to it.

ROBERT M. LA FOLLETTE, so long the stormy petrel of American politics, has passed away. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* is a stupid injunction. For it must be permitted us to speak the truth of both the living and the dead. If not, history would be a farrago and good men and pure souls and discerning and courageous leaders of mankind could not be distinguished from the other sort. All would be labelled alike.

SO in estimating the public career of La Follette it is necessary to say that he stood for nothing fundamental, that he did not care for fundamental truths, shrewdly surmising that these would be in his way. He is reported on good authority to have said that he "did not want to hear anything about the Single Tax since he had observed that such knowledge unfitted a man for public service." And he was right, in perhaps a profounder sense than he suspected.

SUCH "public service" as he strove to render, the few political reforms he was able to effect, certain judicial proposals of a more questionable character that struck at the organic life of the nation, and his support of the Philippine war of aggression—these comprise the record of his achievements. What is good in it is unimportant; what is of importance is dubious, or worse. His sugges-

tions were always for more socialism. Wisconsin's government is typical of the La Follette tendency—it is frightfully over-commissioned.

HE will have his successors, of course. These will echo his own frank statement, that he "didn't want to hear anything of the Single Tax since such knowledge tended to unfit a man for public service." We have said that in this he was right. For we have nothing to do with the passing political phases of a constantly changing situation. These come and pass—the seasonal political quarrels over the trifling questions about which people become excited for a brief period, the fate of which is no concern of ours. Over it all, it should be our duty to lift high the banner of light with the truth emblazoned thereon, that the earth is the birthright of mankind, that the rent of land belongs to the people and that it is the first duty of government to collect it. Our place is not with those who war for the futilities of partisan politics. Our office is higher than that. We wrong the cause of which we are disciples by the support of men and leaders who care nothing for our principles. It should be little to us whether they fail or triumph. That there are other questions of importance in the world beside our own, is conceded. But life is too short, and the progress of truth too slow, to fritter away our efforts in the support of causes relatively insignificant as compared with the inalienable rights of man to the earth he inhabits. La Follette was right. A faithful adherence to this great truth unfits one for service in behalf of the things that count for so little.

COMMENTING on the unemployment question in Great Britain the *Cleveland Press* has this to say:

"Of course no government can solve a large unemployment condition. It takes cooperation among all the nations to do that. No nation lives to itself alone, and no nation can keep its population profitably employed for long unless the people of other nations are able and willing to buy some of the products of its workers' toil."

WE instance this as a result of the confused thinking so widely current among editors. Where did the writer derive the curious impression that the workers of a nation cannot be employed "for long" unless they can sell to the people of other countries the products of their labor? It is hard to deal with fallacies of this sort, since the burden of proof is on those making such statements. But perhaps a little discussion of the problem will help.

Any solitary individual may make his living if set free on an island naturally fertile, just as Robinson Crusoe did. But when others settle near him the exchange of products begins and the circle of satisfactions is enlarged. This is the advantage that trade and the division of labor confer; the freer it is, and the wider the area over which trade

operates, the wider the circle of satisfactions and the greater the ease with which wealth is produced.

But whether this circle be large or small, as long as there is access to the natural resources, there need be no unemployment. Where men are free to produce, they will want more of the things that others are producing, and thus there is an "effective demand," as the economists say, that insures steady employment. But when there is an artificial restriction of the natural opportunities, when land is fenced in and undue price asked for its use, production is curtailed and unemployment begins.

NOW merely to widen the circle over which trade is extended, (production being carried on everywhere under the same handicaps) is to accomplish nothing. To assume that by multiplying the numbers of those participating in exchange is to solve the unemployment question, is a curious fallacy. Trade being the same everywhere, that is, domestic trade being the same as foreign trade, the exchange of goods for goods, no increase in numbers alters the problem in the slightest degree. Nations do not trade—individuals trade, and every nation has within it the resources necessary for abundant production of all that is needed to sustain life; and with no interference with internal trade, there is constant and lucrative employment.

THAT free trade between nations is the natural trade, and that the circle of satisfaction is widened thereby, is conceded. Tariff barriers *do* interfere with employment and limit the opportunities for greater abundance. But with or without tariffs, there are in every country all the factors that, predicated access to natural opportunities which are all included in the term land, secure all wealth producers a livelihood. There should be no question of unemployment anywhere.

AS for Great Britain, she has ample resources within her own borders for her wealth producers. But these resources are privately monopolized—that, and not the present partial cessation of the ability of peoples of other countries to buy her products, is the main reason why there are vast numbers of unemployed in the nation. Will not the *Cleveland Press* think about this?

GOVERNMENTS and peoples are not yet awake to the real solution of the land question, and thus of most all their economic troubles. But they are, as never before, realizing the importance of a more equitable distribution of ownership in the earth's resources. The International Labor office at Geneva through its organ, *Industrial and Labor Information*, has published surveys of land reform in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria, Finland, the Serb-Croat-Slovene kingdom, Greece and Roumania. In Roumania a total of 5,713,577 hectares of land has been expropriated to over one million cultivators. It is stated