

# 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-