

Great Words From Louis F. Post

TRACING POVERTY TO ITS CAUSE

IT is poverty and fear of poverty that prompt men of honest instincts to steal, to bribe, to take bribes, to oppress, either under color of law or against law, and—what is worse than all because it is not merely a depraved act but a course of conduct that implies a state of depravity—to enlist their talents in hiring work against their convictions. Our civilization cannot long resist such enemies as poverty and fear of poverty breed; to intelligent observers it already seems to yield.

But how is the development of these social enemies to be arrested? Only by tracing involuntary poverty to its cause, and, having found the cause, deliberately removing it.

FIXING THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR POVERTY

By giving Rent to individuals, society ignores this just law. It thereby creates social disorder. Upon society, then, and not upon a Providence which has provided bountifully, nor upon the disinherited poor, rests the responsibility for poverty in civilized conditions.

THE RENT OF LAND BELONGS TO THE PEOPLE

Caused and increased by social growth, the benefits of which should be common, and attaching to land, which should be a common inheritance, Rent emphatically asserts itself as a natural fund for public expenses.

RENT MUST BE TAKEN FOR PUBLIC USES

Thus increase of labor force, a lowering of the standards of living, and depression of Rent, co-operate to bring on what we call "good times." But no sooner do "good times" return than renewed demands for land set in, Rent rises again, Wages fall again, and "hard times" duly reappear. The end of every period of "hard times" finds Rent higher and Wages lower, as a proportion of product even if not as a quantity, than at the end of the previous period.

This result is produced by the disorderly system under which society diverts Rent from common to individual uses. That maladjustment is the fundamental cause of poverty. And progress, so long as the maladjustment continues, instead of tending to remove poverty as naturally progress should, actually generates and intensifies it. Poverty persists with increase of productive power because land values, when Rent is privately appropriated, tend to even further increase.

There can be but one outcome: for individuals, suffering and degradation; for society, lawlessness and destruction or decay.

EARTH THE BIRTHRIGHT OF MANKIND

Equality as to the use of Mother Earth, that and that alone secures to every one an equal opportunity to participate in production and full ownership by each producer of his own share. This is justice, this is order. Unless

our civilization have it for a foundation, new forms of slavery will assuredly lead on into new forms of barbarism.

LAND IS FOR THE USE OF ALL

Land is for the use of all, and rent is caused by the community. To legally vest land ownership in less than the whole, excluding those to come as well as any that are here, is a moral crime against all the excluded. Therefore no government can make a perpetual title to land which is or can become morally binding. Neither can one generation vest the communal earnings of future generations in the heirs or assigns of particular persons by any morally valid title. This they attempt to do when they make grants of land. There is both divine justice and economic wisdom in the command that "the land shall not be sold in perpetuity." All titles to land are subject in the forum of morals to absolute divestment as soon as the people decide upon the change.

NO OWNERSHIP IN THE SOURCE OF WEALTH

If it be wrong for you to own the spring of water which you and your fellows use, is it therefore wrong for you to own the water that you lift from the spring to drink? If so how will you slake your thirst? If you argue in reply that it is not wrong for you to own the spring, then how shall your fellows slake their thirst when you treat them, as you would have a right to, as trespassers upon your property? To own the source of labor products is to own the labor of others; to own what you produce from that source is to own only a product of your own labor. Nature furnishes gold mines, but men fashion gold rings. The right of ownership differs radically.

THE RIGHT TO TERMINATE LAND GRANTS AT ANY TIME

The reserved right of the people to terminate grants of land value, is as truly a part of every grant of land as if it were written expressly in the body of the instrument. Moreover, notice was given when Henry George published "Progress and Poverty," and has been reiterated until the whole civilized world has now become cognizant of it, that an effort is in progress to do what is in effect this very thing. This notice is a moral cloud upon every title. He who buys now, buys with notice. It will not do for him when the time comes to terminate these grants, to say: "I relied upon the good faith of the government whose laws told me I might buy." He has notice, and if he buys he buys at his peril, so far as his expectations of appropriating ground rent or a higher selling value are concerned. Men cannot be allowed to make bets that the effort to retain land values for common use will fail, and then, when they lose their bets, to call upon the people to compensate them for the loss. Read the chapter on "Compensation" in Henry George's "Perplexed Philosopher."

OWNERSHIP OF LAND NOT REASONABLE

It is only custom that makes the ownership of land seem reasonable. I have frequently had occasion to tell of the necessity under which the city of Cleveland, Ohio, found

NEWS—DOMESTIC

Progress In Wisconsin

THE Wisconsin legislature, which has just adjourned, passed a bill, which received the governor's approval, providing for a \$500. exemption on homestead improvements. The Non-Partisan League platform of 1920 and the platform of the Farmer-Labor League of 1922 declared for "a gradual exemption from taxation of farm and city home improvements" and also for "taxation to force into use idle lands held for speculative purposes."

Early in the session of the legislature of this year Senator O. H. Johnson and Assemblyman W. F. Miller introduced bills each providing for a \$1500. exemption on homestead improvements. Numerous hearings on these bills were given by the committees of the Senate and Assembly to which they were referred. Lieutenant-Governor Comings, Commissioner of Markets Edward Nordman, John Harrington of the State Tax Commission, and Attorney-General Ekern were among those who spoke in favor of the bills. The Johnson bill finally went to the Governor after the adoption of an amendment cutting down the amount of the exemption from \$1500. to \$500.

Mr. Harrington worked out a series of tables showing exactly how the exemption law would operate. He assumed an average tax rate in the State of two per cent., and that the exemption would remove ten per cent. of the property of the State from the tax rolls, so that the tax upon the remaining property would be increased approximately ten per cent.

Thus it was shown that the bill would secure a sliding scale of benefits, aiding the smaller homestead owners the most, and adding a sliding scale of increases to the wealthier home owners.

These tables show that a homestead assessed for \$2,500 with \$1,500 of improvements would be taxed \$28. less than at present. When a homestead valuation of \$16,500. was reached the exemption of \$1,500. would be exactly cancelled by the higher rate made necessary.

The table carried the hypothetical cases up to homesteads assessed as high as \$31,500., and showed that the taxes on such homesteads would be \$30. more than at present.

Mr. Harrington stated the purposes of the proposed law as follows:

"To give direct relief to the smaller struggling home owners both on farms and in cities.

"To encourage tenants and others to build and own their own homes.

"To solve in some degree the so-called housing problem.

Mr. Harrington further stated that the bill would help to get rid of "cheap shacks" of which growing complaint is heard in the cities.

"It will not add to the totality of taxes," he said, "for it will not increase the amount to be raised in any tax units, but will cause a slight shifting of the burden of taxation, especially to vacant lands and to non-resident owners."

itself, of paying a landowner several thousand dollars for the right to swing a drawbridge over his land. When I described the matter in that way, the story attracted no attention; it seemed perfectly reasonable to the ordinary lecture audience. But when I described the transaction as a payment by the city to a landowner of thousands of dollars for the privilege of swinging the draw "through that man's air," the audience invariably manifested its appreciation of the absurdity of such an ownership. The idea of owning air was ridiculous; the idea of owning land was not. Yet who can explain the difference, except as a matter of custom?

What The Teacher Taught

WHAT was it that led Henry George to write his masterpiece? The discovery that modern governments were levying taxes in arbitrary ways that hampered industry and worked unfairly as between individuals? Not at all. He has told us plainly enough:

"When I first realized the squalid misery of a great city, it appalled and tormented me and would not let me rest, for thinking of what caused it and how it could be cured." ("Progress and Poverty").

What was the earliest form into which Henry George cast his developing ideas? A treatise on taxation? Not at all. The title of the slim pamphlet that was afterwards expanded into the large volume tells us again what was his fundamental thesis: "Our Land Question and How Alone it can be Settled."

What was the name taken by the earliest organizations formed to bring the great truths of "Progress and Poverty" to public attention? "Anti-Poverty" societies. When the great and eloquent priest aligned himself publicly with Henry George, what did he style his challenge to the world? Lower taxes? Fewer taxes? No taxes? Not at all. Father McGlynn boldly lifted "The Cross of a New Crusade" for equal rights to the earth.

Much mischief lurks in names. How much harm may have come to this new crusade from the label "Single Tax" that was partly forced on it by its opponents and partly accepted by the crusaders, no one can say. Certainly the label has tended to turn the crusade for free land and free men into a purely fiscal question so far as the great uninformed public is concerned. And the label seems even to have misled many faithful disciples into grossly mistaking means for ends.

A. C. PLEYDELL.

"Cost of land is low in proportion to the cost of other goods," says National Association of Real Estate Boards. But will the land-seller wrap his "goods" up and deliver them at your door?

ALLOTMENT boomer says that after you have paid for your lot, the problem of financing your home is decreased 100 per cent. Could a problem be decreased more than 100 per cent.?