

LAND MONOPOLY AND TAXATION IN CALIFORNIA¹

California, the largest State in the Union, excepting Texas, having a total of about 105,000,000 acres is one of the worst land-monopoly ridden states. Originally a Spanish possession, it was settled about 150 years ago by the Franciscan Missionaries who established missions at many points along the coast, under the protection of Spanish soldiers. The Indians were gathered about the mission establishments, and encouraged in industrial pursuits. The raising of cattle and horses was best adopted to their mode of life, and soon great herds, sometimes comprising over 100,000 head of stock, covered the many acres of fertile hills and valleys about the missions.

About the year 1830 the Mexican Government enacted statutes, dis-establishing the missions, and confiscating their lands and other properties. Great grants of lands were then made to private persons. During the period from 1830 to about 1845 practically all of the land available for the raising of stock and farming purposes was thus given away. After the Mexican war, the Treaty of Peace confirmed these grants, and made certain the possession of ranches comprising anywhere from 10,000 to 50,000 acres each. In many of the coast counties between San Francisco and the Mexican line the grants will exceed 700,000 acres. "Smart" Yankees and unscrupulous foreigners took advantage of the innocence and inexperience of the Mexicans, and soon gained from them nearly all of their land. To-day there are many big ranches held by such persons comprising all the way from 150,000 to 700,000 acres each.

There is assessed in California a total in excess of 46,000,000 acres of land. Under the law of this State the value of the land is assessed separately from improvements. The land, other than city and town lots, is assessed at \$671,543,000 and the town lots at \$900,000,000, or a total of \$1,571,332,000. The total of all of the improvements assessed is \$600,000,000, of which \$474,000,000 is on improvements within the cities and towns. The total assessment of money and solvent credits is \$30,000,000, and of all other personal property \$285,000,000. These figures cover all property in the State which is assessed by the cities and counties. The railroads and other public service corporations are assessed only for State purposes and the total of their assessment is \$454,000,000.

During the campaigns for our Home Rule in Taxation Constitutional Amendment in California, I visited more than 40 counties in the State, making studies of land ownership, assessment and taxation. Everywhere I found

¹See Land Monopoly in the United States, page 273.

land monopoly stifling progress, and preventing the development of both the city and the country. On the northern coast of California, from San Francisco to the Oregon line, is the only redwood timber belt in the world. The history of the dispossession of the government of this property is almost a continuous record of perjury and crime. Indictments of dummy timber locators and those who promoted the frauds fill the criminal records of this State. The report of Herbert Knox Smith, United States Corporation Commissioner, shows that seven persons own more than half of this redwood timber.

The northern and eastern counties, principally very mountainous, comprise vast areas of spruce, sugar-pine and other timber. Through its land grants and by other means, the Southern Pacific Railroad has acquired about 18% of the timber in the State, or nearly 900,000 acres. The Walker interest controls 17%. About ten holders possess nearly 80% of all the timber in California.

Siskiyou County, bordering on the Oregon line, has a total of 1,840,000 acres of land assessed, other than forest reserve and other government land. The Central Pacific Railroad Company is assessed for 664,830 acres, or more than 36% of all the land assessed in that county. By keeping this land entirely undeveloped, in its wild natural state, and preventing industrious farmers, lumber men, or cattle men from applying their labor to this land, and thus creating new wealth, this Railroad Company has kept down the value of its land so that the tax paid by it averages less than seven cents per acre. The same condition exists in almost every one of these mountain counties.

The Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys comprise one great valley extending from Mt. Shasta on the north to the Tehachapi in Kern County on the south, a distance of about 500 miles and ranging from 5 to 80 miles wide. In the northern section in Colusa County the Stovall-Wilcoxson Company is assessed for 35,660 acres, largely rich valley land. Having slight improvements and only cattle upon it the tax averages but 22 cents per acre. In the San Joaquin section, Miller and Lux have in Madera, Merced and Fresno counties a total of 533,000 acres, extending for 60 miles from Newman to Mendota. This land is devoted entirely to cattle and sheep. It begins 108 miles from San Francisco. To the east of this land lies some of the most highly cultivated land in California from which is produced 95% of the raisins grown in the United States, and a large part of the dairy products of the State. Yet this Miller and Lux land, under the blight of land monopoly devoted to cattle and sheep, has only a few vaqueros and shepherders living upon it, their employer admitting that the wages paid them will not permit married men to work there.

Kern County is dominated politically, socially, and economically by a few land interests, the manager of one being the political boss. The Kern County Land Company control 428,000 acres of land and pays but 16 cents per acre in taxes; the Southern Pacific has 650,000 acres, much of it valuable oil land, and pays but 5 cents per acre taxes; Miller and Lux have 147,000 acres and pay 18 cents per acre; General Otis and associates of Los Angeles, have 150,000 acres. These four interests control 45% of all the land in that county.

The farmer who improves his land, bringing it from the raw to a state of cultivation, plants alfalfa, sets out trees, brings cattle and other stock upon the land, builds a home for his family and furnishes it, has to pay all the way from 5 to 5,000 times as much per acre in taxes, because of his industry and enterprise, than do the land monopolists. Throughout the Sacramento Valley the taxes of the farmer will average from \$5 to \$10 per acre; in the San Joaquin Valley from \$10 to \$15. Over the Tehachipi, among the orange groves of Riverside County, I found the small farmers tax to average \$20. per acre, and many of them are paying \$30, \$40, and even \$50 per acre in taxes.—E. P. E. T.

OWNERSHIP OF HOMES, UNITED STATES, 1910

(FROM 13th CENSUS REPORT, VOL. 1, CH. XVI)

The homes for which no details were given by enumerators have been distributed as "unknown" in proportion to the known figures for owned and rented.

The term "home" as defined by the census is not synonymous with "dwelling." An apartment is a "home;" the entire building is a "dwelling."

The percentages are based on the homes definitely reported.

	FARM HOMES	Per-centage	OTHER HOMES	Per-centage	TOTAL HOMES	Per-centage
Owned free	2,575,430	42.5	3,408,854	25.7	5,984,284	30.8
Encumbered . . .	1,230,633	20.3	1,701,062	12.7	2,931,695	15.
Unknown	32,268		135,464		167,732	
Total owned by occupier . .	3,838,331	62.8	5,245,380	38.4	9,083,711	45.8
Rented homes . .	2,271,231	37.2	8,426,664		10,697,895	
Unknown	14,048		459,901		473,949	
Total homes	6,123,610		14,131,945	61.6	20,255,555	54.2

The mortgage indebtedness on the farms reported was \$1,726,172,851, being 27.3 of the value (\$6,330,236,951) of such farms.

The total value of all farm land and buildings was \$40,991,449,090.