

DO WE NEED ENEMIES?

By LEONARD A. TOOKE (Portsmouth, England)

Human nature being what it is, is it possible that we will never gain allies until we gain a few enemies? If we stood out against capitalists, trade unionists, immigrants or people of a different race, then we would quickly find allies and enemies by the thousand; but condemning the private appropriation of land rent, we often appeal to a vacuum.

The trouble is that those individuals who pocket land rent are more diffuse than other groups and consequently are not so conspicuous. It is often easy to identify an immigrant by his habits, dress, etc.; it is often easy to identify the "boss" because he sits in an office; it is often easy to identify trade unionists because they are militant. But the recipients of rent merge like chameleons.

If it is true that the way to gain allies is to gain enemies, then our task should be to make the rent recipients more visible. Give them a graphic identity and then perhaps our task might be easier. This can only be done in one way that I am able to visualize - and that is by giving them a crude "label."

Now "labels", I know, are objectionable because they are too vague and generalized, but they can help to focus attention. I suggest, therefore, that the label we should tie on to rent recipients is the simple one of "owner"; and the label we should give to others is the label of "renters". Divide people into owners and renters, and then the renters might soon be allies of great strength and influence.

A common objection to land value taxation is that one man living in a small house might have to pay the same as several living in an apartment block. We would argue (rightly) that he should; but it is extremely difficult to convince the small house owner of this logic. Why not, then, ignore this man's protests and enlist the aid of the apartment dwellers? These people might like to be house owners themselves and will therefore be much easier to convince.

Basil Butterworth (Winter 1975 Journal) objected to a cartoon caricaturing landowners - and so it is, of course, wrong to present landowners as the big fat tyrants of old. It could be, however, that we would gain if we set the renters against the owners. Just think of the potential in setting two trade unionists, two small shopkeepers, two house occupiers or two farmers against each other. One trade unionist, for example, could own a house and another could be renting one; one therefore could be much better off than the other - but we don't hear much about this in trade negotiations. One farmer, for another example, could own a farm and another could rent one - but we don't hear much about this during price reviews.

I am a little more pessimistic than those who say we are making headway. Chaos (the chaos Henry George predicted so vividly) is making faster headway. Is it possible that inducing a confrontation between owners and renters is the way we will eventually change things?

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"The most fortunate man today is the backward soul who owns 40 acres in Arkansas, has two mules, a milk cow, a few hogs, chickens and a garden, and his wife is a whiz at canning." - Cecil Waggoner in the Claude (Texas) News.