

# Open Letter to Henry Ford

Dear Mr. Ford: I have seen a recent newspaper item in which you are quoted as saying, in part, "there's lots of idle land and people can always go back to the land."

Now, the first half of your statement is absolutely true, while the second has many qualifications. Under the present system of land tenure men cannot go back to the land. They cannot have access to the vast natural resources on an equitable or economically sound basis.

The great American philosopher and economist, Henry George, demonstrated many years ago that the instability of our economic affairs was due largely to the withholding of land for speculative purposes. Since speculation naturally takes place in that land which is either most desirable or most likely to become highly desirable, men are compelled either to work the inferior land open to them, or to compete with city workers for jobs.

We see then that men really cannot "always go back to the land," certainly not to land which affords the worker a decent wage. Such land as is available is sub-standard or sub-marginal, and thus definitely unsuitable for the production of satisfactions to which American workers are accustomed.

Henry George did not stop at making a mere initial analysis; he pursued the subject and proposed a simple, logical and wholly just solution, a solution which does not disturb the capitalist system of enterprise (but which, indeed, would rather stimulate it intensively), or compromise in any way the political or personal liberties which Americans now enjoy and hope to enjoy forever.

George proposed the social collection of land rent—in short he proposed that the values added

to land by society be collected for society's benefit, so that no man could hold land for merely speculative purposes; every man would then have access to land for purposes of production, either agricultural or industrial.

This is, of course, a very inadequate summary of Georgist theory. I hope, however, I have indicated to you how your suggested return to the use of land (or natural resources) is balked by a purely artificial device of civilization, namely, speculative private ownership of land.

Georgist philosophy calls for a system of free capitalist enterprise by free men; it asks only that all men be given equal access to the earth so that subsequently each can profit in accordance with his individual ability and industry. The Georgist philosophy is for all the people, for the industrialists and the laboring masses as well; it abhors dictatorship, special privilege and class distinctions.

Yes, Mr. Ford, in the parlance of the day, "you've got something" when you say "there's lots of idle land;" but you have to make a few serious qualifications when you state "people can always go back to the land." Common sense suggests "what land?," or "whose land?" For all land, except for a comparatively few acres of desert, is "owned" by individuals.

You are organizing, it is reported, a "back to the land" movement. Anything pertaining to a more equitable and more intensive use of natural resources is of deep interest to me. I assume that for your part you would be interested in knowing something about the Georgist philosophy, since its doctrine is based on a "back to the land" philosophy—in a very comprehensive sense. Would you care to "swap" information?

SIDNEY J. ABELSON.