

# Liberation for the Race

by NOAH D. ALPER

WE HEAR a good deal about pre-Civil War slavery, but we seldom discuss a pervasive continuing enslavement from which there seems to be no escape. This slavery affects all races without discrimination and has nothing to do with color or nationality. It has kept the entire human race in economic chains.

Perhaps it could be said that the Caucasians had the best opportunity to establish individual freedom from economic exploitation and they failed to do so. Wherever they have been conquerors they have repeated the historic pattern of exploitation and have added a few forms of their own. They had for their heritage the teaching that "the heaven is the Lord's . . . the profit of the earth is for all." They should have given more thought to this ethical precept—the penalty for their neglect is great.

Moses was keenly aware of the social problems arising from an unjust land tenure system. He knew from experience the land policies of the Pharaohs which still exist in Egypt but which have been largely eliminated or greatly modified in modern Israel. The land reform which Moses originated, known as the year of the Jubilee (return of land to the former owners every 50 years), would not be suitable today. Nevertheless the just spirit of the proposal should not have been lost.

The free enterprise system demands the use of title to land. It also demands the full responsibility of title holders to pay fairly for what they enjoy from society, just as renters of office or factory space are expected to pay for what they get. But we must remember that whereas land is deemed to be the common heritage of all, under our present high cost system, ownership is becoming ever more illusory.

It is unfortunate that when "experts" attempt land reform, as in Japan, they revert to the ancient agrarian concept which ignores the urban, industrial, financial and commercial aspects of natural-resource-land where oil, minerals, water power and chemicals are available. The answer lies not in redistribution of the land itself but in its rental value. This can be shared even though the land cannot be equitably divided.

In the free world where there have never been so many people calling themselves economists, all of them should have probed Ricardo's law of rent. Too many have failed to see how this law could be used as a nearly perfect method of achieving economic justice. Simple as it is, it points to the natural and equal (or equalized) right to all land in common and, at the same time, it affords assurance of his rights to each private title user.

A question arises as to whether other races would have acted more ethically where the white man failed. Some races, the Indians for example, have a history of non-exploitative land tenure, yet if their production had evolved as the industrial economy has, even they might have bowed to expediency.

As spokesmen for the black race crowd the scene, the criticism is sometimes made that they have no positive proposal for betterment. It may be their turn to struggle for an environment of freedom and for conditions of outstanding justice which others have missed. For themselves and for history they do well to take it as their principal task to serve humanity by conducting an intensive scientific inquiry such as Henry George initiated in *Progress and Poverty*.

If leaders of the emerging black race reached a firm conviction for achieving

equal rights and justice to land they might lead the way for the entire human race to experience economic freedom. It would be ironical, but a boon to mankind, if the Caucasian race was freed of its repressive land tenure system and tax practices and of its own

economic enslavement by the descendants of a less privileged race. If such an honor can come to anyone may it be the blacks who achieve it. Today it is their turn to seek an enlightened land policy which has been dismissed too lightly.

### **Ricardo On Rent**

**L**AND rent has certain unique characteristics, but there is nothing mysterious about rent," said Percy R. Williams in "Understanding the Tax On Land Rent" (June HGN). He quoted Ricardo's statement that "rent is that portion of the produce of the earth which is paid to the landlord . . . for the use of the land, and for the use of the land only."

Siebe Sevenster, a Dutch Geogist, author of a book on *Creative Justice Through Land Reform*, also quotes Ricardo's *Principles of Economics* (Everyman's Library #590) but differs somewhat from Mr. Williams in interpretation. While he agrees there is no mystery about rent, he thinks there is competition in every situation and by the single tax monopoly rent will diminish through the competition of the landowners. "The landowner knows that the future value will mean more tax, and that brakes the monopoly," he says.

Mr. Williams finds it necessary to collect rent. Mr. Sevenster says, "the point is to give the right destination to the rent, this is to the community." He doubts if the economic power of the landowner will be limited by a single tax and sees the fault lying with the community as a whole which gives the rent to private persons and taxes every wage earner.

He doubts also whether the single tax is designed to reduce rent. It might improve the economic situation and the result would be more production

and more need for good housing, recreation and rent of land — which is quite natural.

A member of the New York HGS teaching staff, Josephine Hansen, also an enthusiastic student of Ricardo, finds the views of Messrs. Williams and Sevenster interesting but believes they are talking of different concepts. Percy Williams is discussing 20th Century economics and the impact of population and technology on rent. Henry George was aware that Ricardo, though not the first to do so, had defined an agrarian law of rent which considers all production (farming) going from good to worse land—and all marginal land needing more labor and capital to be worked. This is true only in an agrarian economy in which there is no land held in speculation. In the North Slope (Alaska) for instance one sees a marginal land turning into a potential high income land. We do not always go from good to worse—sometimes worse becomes best, says Mrs. Hansen.

Otto Dorn, a former director and trustee of the HGS, used to tell about his family going out to the shores of Lake Erie to settle. They rejected the sandy soil near the lake and moved upland to the rich farming soil. The sandy shore became the harbor and center of the City of Cleveland. "The economic difference for my generation," said Mr. Dorn, "would have been infinite if we had held the land where people congregated."