

LAND VALUES

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Editorial Offices:

The United Committee for the Taxation
of Land Values,

11, Tothill Street, London, S.W.1.

Telegrams: "Eulav, Vic, London."

Telephone: Victoria 7323.

All communications to be addressed to the Editor.

"OUR POLICY"

"We would simply take for the community what belongs to the community—the value that attaches to land by the growth of the community; leave sacredly to the individual all that belongs to the individual.—

Henry George.

SHORTER HOURS FOR LABOUR

The agitation for a shorter working week is in many respects the most significant feature of the Labour movement to-day. Possibly the exceptional urgency of this demand at the moment is due to the excessively long hours which many workmen have been compelled to put in during the war, and against which a strong and natural reaction was bound to arise as peace conditions began to be restored. But there are other causes also at work. There is a demand for more leisure, as a right to which the wage earners are as much entitled as any other section of the community—a right which is essential not only to their enjoyment but to their advancement. Another factor also prominent is the plea that only by reducing the hours of labour is it possible to absorb the unemployed surplus of labour which is seen to be steadily growing in volume as demobilization proceeds.

What we principally wish to consider is the economic effect of this movement and its ultimate effect on wages and employment. But we must remark in passing that there can hardly be two opinions as to the desirability of shortening the hours of labour for the sake of improving both the physical and the mental condition of the workers.

The apathy of the masses with regard to political questions, even those which most deeply affect them, is in no small measure due to sheer exhaustion which renders sustained thought and attention repulsive, and which in many cases hardly allows the time even if it left the energy to take an interest in such matters. Reduction of the hours of labour is therefore in itself a most desirable social reform, especially in so far as it might be expected to facilitate other reforms.

Now to consider the economic effect of this change. In the first place if the total weekly wage be maintained at the same amount while the hours of work are reduced, the alteration involves really an increase in the hourly rate of wages. This is the most obvious effect of the proposal and is immediately fastened on by its opponents. It does not necessarily follow, however, that it involves a real increase of wages, that is to say, an increase of wages as measured by the share or proportion of the total produce of the industry which is obtained by the wage-worker. It is quite possible, and there need be no doubt that in many cases it has actually occurred that shorter hours have meant increased efficiency, and that therefore the production obtained in the shorter time has been as great as in the longer time. There is much reason for thinking that in highly skilled trades and in trades where the hours are very long this would almost certainly be the final result. The workers would accordingly gain in shorter hours without any corresponding loss to the employer or to the landlord—the other two parties who share the produce of industry.

In so far, however, as this conclusion is true, the plea that a reduction of the hours of labour will find opportunity for the employment of more men and will therefore diminish the amount of unemployment goes by the board. The unemployed man remains, and in him the greatest obstacle to a permanent improvement in the status of labour, for it is obvious that no great and permanent improvement is possible so long as there is a considerable number of men unemployed who are compelled to take a job at almost any wage rather than starve. Every intelligent workman is compelled to realise sooner or later that under the present organisation of society this is the greatest factor in determining the rate of wages. We come then to the conclusion that reduction of hours in so far as it is compensated by increased efficiency will not reduce the volume of unemployment.

The proposal to diminish unemployment by reducing the hours of labour is based on the tacit assumption that there is only a certain amount of work to be done, and

that therefore the only means of employing every man is to spread this work out over the whole body of workers. This is an assumption around which there can be much profitless discussion. The argument for the taxation of land values is that land monopoly restricts the opportunities of production and employment by restricting access to the source of raw materials. This restriction results in aggravated competition of workers for jobs and a low rate of wages, and on the other hand it results in high rents and speculative prices for land due to the artificial narrowing of the supply.

It is evident therefore that a decrease in the hours of labour, though most desirable in itself, does nothing to remove the fundamental difficulty. Even if it resulted in more persons being employed—which as we have seen would not be the case where it led to an increase of efficiency—it would not increase the aggregate amount paid in wages, though it might distribute that sum between a larger number of persons, each receiving a smaller sum. The monopolists who control the land would still be able to demand their pound of flesh.

The so-called "Capitalist System" will remain intact, if its basis remains untouched. It is only necessary to study the financial press in order to see what that basis is. It consists in the ownership of land, coal mines, iron ore deposits or other natural agents embraced in the economic concept of land. There is a steady tendency for those firms which do not possess such advantages to be absorbed by stronger ones which do. We thus witness the growth of what has been called the "vertical trust," where there is a string of industries reaching back, say, from the shipbuilding and engineering trades to those which produce the coal and iron or other raw materials. This tendency is concealed because the firms which thus unify into a trust still carry on business under the original style.

While sympathising therefore to the full with ideals actuating those who are striving for shorter hours of labour, we must continue to affirm that this of itself will not bring any permanent solution. The trouble will break out in a fresh phase and continue to break out until the ultimate solution is reached in the restoration to the community of the communal right to land; when the value of land is taken as revenue for the benefit of all and it is made impossible for any one to hold out of use the land and all its potentialities for the employment of labour in useful and profitable production.

F. C. R. D.

RIGHTS TO THE NATURAL SOURCES OF ENERGY.

BY JAMES DUNDAS WHITE, LL.D.

The right to the land includes in the ordinary course the rights to the natural sources of energy that are appurtenant to it, such as water-power, wind-power and coal. The gradual development of these sources of energy has been the mainspring of industrial progress; and the principal reason why industrial progress has failed to benefit the masses of the people, as it could and ought to have done, is that the land, including not only the surface but also the minerals and these other adjuncts, have been treated as belonging to the landed interest instead of to the people. If the people are to possess what is justly theirs, they must enforce their right to the land and all that naturally pertains to it.

WATER-POWER

The first of the natural sources of energy to be utilised was water-power. The water-wheel, in its earliest stage, appears to have been a wheel fitted with buckets to scoop water from the stream and discharge it at a higher level for purposes of irrigation, and to have been actuated by hand or by treading. The next stage was to attach float-boards to the wheel, so that it might be actuated by the flow of the stream. To the practical Romans is attributed the third stage of constructing the wheel as a water-motor and using it to operate a mill by means of a shaft and gearing, as described by Vitruvius in *De Architectura* c. 10. This use of water-power suggested new possibilities for lightening the lot of labour, which found expression in a Greek poem generally attributed to Antipater of Thessalonica, about the close of the first century B.C. (*Greek Anthology*, Bk. IX., *Declamatory Epigrams*, 418); it has been rendered into English poetry by Mr. J. A. Pott, who has kindly permitted me to quote his verses here:—

THE WATER MILL

Ye shall toil no more, ye maids of the mill,
Nor rise with the early sun,
Though the cock should crow, ye may slumber still,
Heedless of work undone.

For the Naiads hasten at Deo's call
To lighten the tasks ye do,
And the nymphs of fountain and waterfall
Are turning the mill for you.

So the ponderous wheel goes round and round
As they dance in the water's flow,
And the hollow stones where the corn is ground
Turn to their touch below.

For the life of old has returned again,
'Tis the golden age of yore,
And the goddess' work shall be free from pain,
And ye shall be tired no more.*

* *Greek Love Songs and Epigrams*, by J. A. Pott, 2nd Series, pp. 55-6; London, 1913, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd. My attention was first directed to a prose translation quoted by Mr. Thomas Cameron in an article on *The Triumph of Labour* in "The Single Tax" of August, 1895; but an error in the name of the poet made it difficult to trace the passage. For the correct reference I am indebted to Mr. T. E. Page, one of the Editors of the Loeb Classical Library (Heinemann), in which a new edition of the Greek Anthology has recently been published, with translations by Mr. W. R. Paton, this particular epigram being in Vol. III., pp. 232-3. It was also quoted by Johann Beckmann, in the Chapter on Corn Mills in his *History of Inventions and Discoveries*