

production and living standards that increase of population brings. Certainly, a form of control which gives strong preference to highly skilled immigrants and virtually debars the entry of the unskilled is, on humanitarian grounds, deplorable, for it is the unskilled who are likely to be the poorest and suffering the greatest hardships.

There will always be migration, but its extent and many of the problems to which it gives rise, are often the result of poverty. Increasing prosperity in underdeveloped countries would check the drift of population to richer countries, and the key to achieving that prosperity is to abolish the barrier to progress arising from the private ownership of land and to throw open the land to the people. Whatever else may be necessary, this is the first essential step, and without it all other attempts are bound to fail. A barrier that frustrates the development of agriculture and other primary industries in underdeveloped countries stunts the economic growth of those countries, for it is on the solid foundation of vigorous primary industries, particularly agriculture, that extensive division of labour and heavy industrialisation become possible. Even a doctor, whatever his sympathies, can make a poor living in a country where no one can afford to pay for his services. Only when the peoples of the underdeveloped world begin to raise their standard of living by creating a healthy agriculture, helped no doubt by foreign teaching and foreign capital, will workers of all kinds, skilled and unskilled, be able to find a decent living in their own countries.

BINDWEED OF THE WELFARE STATE

A STUDY GROUP which includes Colin Clark, Ralph Harris and Graham Hutton among its members could scarcely fail to produce a report worth reading. *Towards a Welfare Society** is a stimulating document, welcome not least because it makes a hecatomb of the sacred cows that have been consuming so much provender of late. For example: "Rationing by price in the markets is more egalitarian than rationing by officials controlling queues waiting for insufficient supplies. Patients waiting for doctors, parents waiting for headmasters, hopeful tenants waiting for Council officials, and pensioners waiting for pensions officials make a better case for themselves or their children if they are literate, physically fit, well-connected or politically alert." (p. 10). There is plenty more good sense of a similar kind.

The "planners" who have evolved our present public systems of education, health services, housing and pensions, never really designed them according to an overall plan. Like Topsy, these systems "just grewed." They "grewed" out of a mass of different, and sometimes contradictory, empirical considerations. The time is long

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overdue for people to sit down calmly and consider whether the aims that applied when our modern services developed are any longer applicable. Half a century ago, council houses were a social service, designed to rescue very poor people from slums. Today there are many places where the incomes of the council house dwellers must be higher than the incomes of the dwellers in private houses who are subsidising them. The process of providing free medical service for all, though designed to ensure that poverty is no bar to health, may well have the practical result of filling the doctors' surgeries with people who have minor ailments but plenty of time on their hands, while people who are more seriously ill are unwilling or unable to face the queues. We can all think of plenty of other examples of the same kind of thing.

The members of this study group have given a hard, long look at our social services, and have come out in favour of a "voucher system." I do not think that they would claim for one moment that their answer is complete—if, indeed, a complete answer is ever possible. But the theme that runs through the pamphlet is worthy of the applause and attention of every libertarian: "The only effective way in which people can learn to choose is by being able to practise the art of choice. They will not learn if they are not allowed to choose." (p. 37).

Just so. The study group is thinking on the right lines, and their work deserves careful study by politicians, economists, public servants, and all others who are—or think they ought to be—the leaders of contemporary opinion.

ROY DOUGLAS

REPUDIATION!

The United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values, founded in 1907, emphatically repudiates any suggestion that the Land Commission Act bears any relation to the reform the Committee has consistently advocated, viz., the annual taxation of all land at its market value whether it be used or held out of use and irrespective of present use or potential development.

Further, it denies that the formation of the Land Commission is in any way a step in that direction or that the Commission will ever achieve its own limited objectives of making land cheaper and ending land speculation.

In that the Act does not touch existing land values or increases in land values that accrue where no redevelopment takes place, the levy is, in effect, a tax on development and far removed from the legislation required to achieve the Committee's objectives, which are the end of land speculation, cheaper land, a more plentiful supply of land and the return to the community of values that belong to the community, objectives which only a true land-value tax can achieve.

The above statement appeared in the Personal Column of *The Times*, Friday, 17 March, 1966.