

Georgist hope of a city in need



• "Whites Only Need Apply" — imported workers in Roxbury

BLACK leaders know what the fight is all about, here on the streets of Roxbury, and it is not the mugging by petty thieves.

"It is a struggle for the resources of the land," says John Marshall, a bear of a man who chairs a community committee on economics. "People aren't generally educated about that, which is why the educational job has to be done."

Roxbury is a seedy suburb of proud Boston, its pointed tip penetrating deep into the side of the downtown district where land prices are higher than the skyscraper buildings.

The business community — and the politicians — covet the land of Roxbury. As downtown land prices became unaffordable, so the real estate industry turned its eyes on the juicy sites of Roxbury. That has produced an unwelcome result for the families in the tenement buildings: creeping asphyxiation.

First, gentrification displaced low-income families from South End. Social worker Sadiki Kambron told *Land and Liberty*: "They pushed us to this point, and if we

MANDELA

• 12.5 sq miles. Population: 150,000.

• 85% of the land is absentee owned. Housing: 47% subsidised. 85% of residents are renters.

• Children: 40% of the 1990 high school graduate population could read on the 8th grade level. And they were the best 40%. There's a 50-55% drop-out rate.

leave here, we will have to move towards Cape Cod."

Black activists have read the warning signs in the physical fabric of their community. It is called blight — the decay associated with speculation in land. Shrewd dealers buy property, freeze out the tenants and idle the land.

IN THE mid-Eighties, activists decided to take control of their fate. They formed project FATE (Focusing Attitudes Towards Empowerment), and appointed Sadiki Kambron as its Director.

Objective: break away from Boston and create a new municipality — Mandela.

The black community knew that the future held no hope for them.

• Property speculators were

buying up the buildings and displacing the tenants. This, plus cuts in federal grants, means that homelessness will increase over the next decade.

• Jobs are scarce, and Latin immigrants are flowing in. The Latins will do "whatever has to be done to survive, and in a country that believes that there is a limited pie, for which everyone has to compete, this sets the minority groups into competition," say the black leaders.

A century ago, American social reformer Henry George emphasised, in *Progress and Poverty* (1879), that there was no such thing as a limited pie: remove land monopoly, and people increase the size of the pie by generating their wages. That argument has not been lost on the people of Roxbury, for they have seen that land monopoly is the most lucrative game in town.

GIVEN the tax laws, land speculation makes sense. In Boston, developers have to eat into Roxbury to relieve the pre-

Continued on Page 4 —

ssure on the central business district.

Land prices have risen (or can be expected to rise). This means low-income families occupy potentially high-value land; they have to be ejected.

"Red-lining" is one result. As speculators allow their properties to decay, banks refuse to grant mortgages to existing property owners (who are consequently forced to pay extortionate rates of interest). This accelerates the rate of decline.

Said Sadiki Kambon: "They are waiting to sell the land to the highest bidder. And to do that, they are displacing us."

THE social expression of this process is heartbreaking: life without hope.

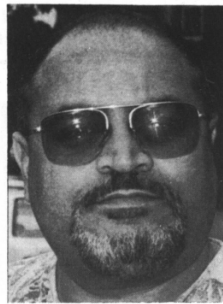
And to rub salt into social wounds, the Boston politicians are showing a tough exterior. They have located more police stations in Roxbury. "This is a message to the developers that their interests will be looked after," says John Marshall.

The Mandela leaders are determined to fight back and restore self-esteem. Children, in particular, need more help. Schools are turning out many young people who cannot read or write, who cannot fill in job application forms: prime candidates for the narcotics trade.

The Mandela visionaries believe that only through independence can they wrest power back to the people. The struggle is illustrated in the education system. The school committee was abolished, which withdrew power from parents. "The problems won't be solved by the mayor taking over," says John Marshall. "Most teachers don't live in Boston, or their kids don't go to school in Boston."

Men are also suffering from rejection in the labour market.

Mandela leaders do not be-



• John Marshall

lieve the assertion that "if you are willing to work with your hands, you can get work." All the evidence contradicts this axiom, and for evidence they point to discriminatory trade union regulations. They see New Hampshire residents drive into Boston to fill "their" jobs. "Why should people from outside come in at \$200 a day, when we don't have jobs?" asks Marshall.

And what happens when the community expresses disaffection? Their activities are criminalised. The subtle message is conveyed that, whoever opposes current trends is a criminal. For example, peaceful picketing may be treated as criminal activity.

So Mandela became a vision for the beleaguered community. "The only salvation we have is municipal incorporation," explains Sadiki Kambon. Their attempts so far have not met with electoral success, but they are not disheartened.

"I am convinced that we are going to win. It's a protracted struggle. When it first came up in '86, there was a feeling that it was an overnight phenomenon. We have now been through three campaigns, and our support grows significantly. The City of Boston is concerned." He believes that they will win through by 1995/6.

The rewards of success would be large, for the heart of Man-

dela would actually be the centre of metropolitan Boston.

The campaign for independence is viewed as part of the process of rebuilding people's expectations, ambitions, obligations. People "have to have faith," and Project FATE involves them in political activity.

Right now: "There is a feeling of helplessness out there: whenever a plug is pulled, we are the victim. We are relegated to a state of dependency, which means we are doomed. We have to dictate where we go from here. The biggest advantage, psychologically, is to be able to control your own destiny: and that, whenever the shots are called, we call them."

A new municipality, promise the Mandela leaders, would restore parental influence over schools and make teachers accountable to the community. Jobs would go to local residents, and appropriate training programmes would encourage small businesses.

WHAT would support this new power structure? Sadiki Kambon characterised as "the key No 1 priority" the need to establish their own tax base. "And that is the land tax, which is what we are really intrigued by."

Research had shown that a tax on land values would be sufficient to finance their city. And a reformed property tax would reduce the burden on residential property owners. Now, to promote the notion of site-value taxation, they are educating people on the feasibility of their programme.

The Mandela leaders realise that a tax which penalised people for holding valuable land vacant would renew the ailing local construction industry.

Continued on Page 5 ▶

TRUST WORTH PAYING FOR

IN CENTURIES gone by there was common land for use by all, and much has been written of the tragedy of the enclosures. It is precisely because of enclosure and because man employs huge amounts of capital in improving land and putting fixtures on to it that we have to consider economic remedies to the problem, all of which involve restoring economic value to the dispossessed. However, it is already possible to allow people equal and free access to land.

In Britain, the National Trust's Enterprise Neptune Appeal was established in the 1960s, to preserve the beauty of the coastline. All moneys raised are used to purchase land adjoining the coast (and in some cases to restore it). The main aim is the purchase of land, not buildings or other improvements, for the enjoyment of the public.

The Trust can now boast that more than one in every six miles of coastline in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is safe under their protection.

What is this project but a

COMMUNITY LAND

LAND-value taxation is one way to socialise the benefits of land, but IAN LAMBERT draws attention to another model for achieving this result.

national, and international, community land trust project? The Enterprise Neptune Appeal effectively is a non-governmental scheme for nationalising land, but with full compensation to existing landowners. (It may be galling to have to buy back our own country, but we should never have allowed it to be taken in the first place.)

On a continuing basis, in economic terms the Trust is applying the economic rent of the coastline for the benefit of those who seek to use it - the national and international public. The National Trust is really international in that, although it only owns property in England and Wales and Northern Ireland, anyone in the world is entitled to access to their proper-

community. Homes would be bought. "People take care of the homes they own. It's not the resale incentive of the home; it's more 'This is mine, it represents me.' It's a psychological rather than a pocket-book realisation."

Says Sadiki Kambon: "Incorporation means we would rebuild from the ground up, feeling good about our families. It's a physical thing, taking and building on the land, but this is associated with the spiritual thing. We have to build up the community.

"We are offering LVT as innovative; it must be offered to the people. We are not saying what Roxbury is going to be called - Mandela - and it is the same with the land tax: it will be up to the people, the community, to determine whether they adopt it."

ties, either as a member or upon paying a fee for admission.

WHY are so many landowners and businesses keen to promote this appeal? Some of them may be motivated by philanthropy, but others might just benefit commercially. Imagine: you are developing some flats or holiday cottages. Wouldn't it be nice if the National Trust bought up the adjacent coastline, restored it and gave everyone free access? That would certainly improve the value of the developer's own sites.

By promoting the purchase of coastline for preservation, landowners actually reduce the supply of land for the purposes of economic production, thereby pushing up the price. (The Trust is the largest private landowner in Britain and its lands are by statute inalienable.) Don't get me wrong; I am not suggesting that the National Trust should develop Britain's coastline - far from it; I am merely pointing out that there are many indirect beneficiaries of the Enterprise Neptune Appeal, and they always keep quiet about it.

The National Trust must be finding it more and more difficult to buy the remaining land. They must be suffering the same kind of problem as the railway companies in the last century. Suppose you want to build a railway line from London to Bristol but you cannot afford all of the land. Instead you buy up half the land and build as far as Swindon. The fact that you have built as far as Swindon makes Swindon very attractive and pushes up the price of land between Swindon and Bristol. Once speculators hear about this, the price of land is driven up almost exponentially. *The same phenomenon has killed the London Docklands and any prospect of widening the M25 - now officially the most dangerous motorway in Britain.*

ENTERPRISE Neptune sites must come close to a government sponsored form of single tax community. The National Trust is a charity and therefore exempt from taxation on income and capital gains. Moreover, most donations

Continued on Page 6 ▶

◀ From Page 4

That would create more jobs and improved living conditions.

Vacant land, they say, can be developed for "very serious money". They would eventually develop Mandela's downtown into a thriving centre, generating enormous tax revenue. The social effects would also be striking.

• Crime would diminish. "Options are opened up," predicts John Marshall. "Right now, young people have no opportunity that they consider to be realistic. We have smart people in TV and records, so they [obviously have the ability to] develop to being a chef or own a restaurant or be a construction worker or policeman or hospital worker or teacher."

• New pride in the com-