

LAND AND LIBERTY

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Editorial Offices:
177 Vauxhall Bridge Road,
London, SW1V 1EU
Tel: 0171-834 4266

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EDITORIAL

Picking up the tab for the bill of rights & wrongs

BRITAIN will now embark on a debate about the contents of a Bill of Rights. Other reforms to the political system will present a unique opportunity for the electorate to engage in a dialogue about the constitutional foundations of their country.

Some changes will come easily...a Freedom of Information Act...abolishing the right of hereditary Peers to sit in the House of Lords...Numerically, few people will resist such proposals.

Missing from the debate, however - unless strenuous efforts are made to counteract the risk - will be questions that identify the most serious of infringements of the rights of citizens: the continuous attack on their earned incomes through the tax system. Taxation is based on the longest running fraud in history. Because of the legally-sanctioned theft of public value - the rent of land and natural resources - governments have to resort to taxation of people's wages and savings.

And yet, tongue-in-cheek constitution writers - from the Founding Fathers of America in the 18th century to the draughtsmen in Russia and South Africa within the last five years - have waxed lyrical about the rights of citizens in relation to "their" natural resources. We are all supposed to share in those riches.

Hogwash!

Words like "heritage" are bandied about to convince the population that they are free and equal citizens with rights like everyone else. Those falsehoods ought to be challenged in the courts.

The "rule of law" does not in practice apply to the natural heritage of any modern society. Our laws were written by people who had every reason to prevent an equal shareout, and it is surely time to investigate the possibilities of bringing a suit against a government for being derelict in the discharge of its duty towards citizens.

There are coherent grounds on which to launch such an action, not least among them the fact that people in countries like

the USA and UK are dying for no better reason than that they are involuntarily excluded from earning a living wage. Poverty is a killer. Poverty is primarily spawned by a social system that excludes people from an equal right of access to life-giving natural resources.

A government which not only sanctions but actually administers such a system is culpable and ought to be challenged in the courts.

Governments are supposed to ensure fair dealing in society. At least, that is what the politicians keep telling us. They enforce - in the labour and capital markets - the principle that people must pay the value of the benefits that they receive. This is the guiding principle when people trade goods and services.

But the exception to this rule operates in the land market. There, rent is extracted in return for no equivalent value contributed by the owner of the land. That is theft pure and simple and a violation of all the natural and theological laws that underpin our civilisation.

The solution is a nationally administered tax on the rent of land. But if the Blair government is to prove itself capable of delivering fairness it should heed the warning of Austen Chamberlain, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1919-21) who was determined not to let the reforming Liberals under Lloyd George get away with such a restructuring of the tax system. He said:

"It is certain that if we do nothing the Radical Party will sooner or later establish their national tax, and once established in that form any Radical Chancellor... will find it an easy task to give a turn of the screw...on the other hand if this source of revenue... is once given to municipalities, the Treasury will never be able to put its finger in the pie again..."

Land taxers should not fall for the tricks of politicians who wish to thwart the rights of citizens.

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