

## THOMAS PAINE ON THE LAND QUESTION

[The following passage is taken from a pamphlet by Thomas Paine entitled "Agrarian Justice opposed to Agrarian Law and to Agrarian Monopoly." It was written, as the preface states, in the winter of 1795 and 96, but was not published till a later date. The circumstance which determined the author to publish this tract was the appearance of a sermon by the Bishop of Llandaff entitled "The Wisdom and Goodness of God in having made both rich and poor." "Agrarian Justice" is printed in the second volume of *THE POLITICAL AND MISCELLANEOUS WORKS OF THOMAS PAINE*, published by R. Carlile, London, 1819.

The latter part of the pamphlet is not here reprinted. It deals mainly with the practical steps which Paine proposed in order to secure to every one his share in the land. His proposal was briefly this: When property changed hands by death it should be subject to a tax of ten per cent., this being in Paine's opinion the average amount of communal value attaching to property. The revenue thus obtained should be used "to create a National Fund, out of which there shall be paid to every person, when arrived at the age of twenty-one years, the sum of Fifteen Pounds sterling, as a compensation in part for the loss of his or her natural inheritance by the introduction of the system of landed property; and also the sum of Ten Pounds per annum, during life, to every person now living of the age of fifty years, and to all others as they shall arrive at that age." This essay of Thomas Paine's is one more illustration of the fact that thoughtful men in all ages have realised the fundamental importance of the land question. His plan for restoring the rights of the people to the land is probably as perfect as that age could have produced, for it must be remembered that political economy was in its infancy. Four years previously Dr. Anderson had stated the law of rent but it won no general acceptance until re-stated by Ricardo and others twenty years later. Building on this foundation Henry George elaborated his more perfect plan for restoring to the people their rights and worked out in all its fulness the benefit that would accrue to society from giving back to all their equal share in the land.]

To preserve the benefits of what is called civilized life, and to remedy, at the same time, the evils it has produced, ought to be considered as one of the first objects of reformed legislation.

Whether that state that is proudly, perhaps erroneously, called civilization, has most promoted or most injured the general happiness of man, is a question that may be strongly contested. On one side the spectator is dazzled by splendid appearances; on the other he is shocked by extremes of wretchedness; both of which it has created. The most affluent and the most miserable of the human race are to be found in the countries that are called civilized.

To understand what the state of society ought to be, it is necessary to have some idea of the natural and primitive state of man; such as it is at this day among the Indians of North America. There is not, in that state, any of those spectacles of human misery which poverty and want present to our eyes in all the towns and streets in Europe. Poverty, therefore, is a thing created by that which is called civilized life. It exists not in the natural state. On the other hand, the natural state is without those advantages which flow from Agriculture, Arts, Sciences, and Manufactures.

The life of an Indian is a continual holiday, compared with the poor of Europe; and on the other hand, it appears to be abject when compared to the rich. Civilization, therefore, or that which is so called, has operated two ways, to make one part of society more affluent, and the other part more wretched than would have been the lot of either in a natural state.

It is always possible to go from the natural to the civilized state, but it is never possible to go from the civilized to the natural state. The reason is, that man, in a natural state,

subsisting by hunting, requires ten times the quantity of land to range over to procure himself sustenance, than would support him in a civilized state, where the earth is cultivated. When, therefore, a country becomes populous by the additional aids of cultivation, arts, and science, there is a necessity of preserving things in that state; without it, there cannot be sustenance for more, perhaps, than a tenth part of its inhabitants. The thing, therefore, now to be done, is to remedy the evils, and preserve the benefits that have arisen to society, by passing from the natural to that which is called the civilized state.

Taking then the matter upon this ground, the first principle of civilization ought to have been, and ought still to be, that the condition of every person born into the world, after a state of civilization commences, ought not to be worse than if he had been born before that period. But the fact is, that the condition of millions in every country in Europe, is far worse than if they had been born before civilization began, or had been born among the Indians of North America of the present day. I will shew how this fact has happened.

It is a position not to be controverted, that the earth, in its natural uncultivated state, was, and ever would have continued to be, the **COMMON PROPERTY OF THE HUMAN RACE**. In that state every man would have been born to property. He would have been a joint life-proprietor with the rest in the property of the soil, and in all its natural productions, vegetable and animal.

But the earth in its natural state, as before said, is capable of supporting but a small number of inhabitants compared with what it is capable of doing in a cultivated state. And as it is impossible to separate the improvement made by cultivation, from the earth itself, upon which that improvement is made, the idea of landed property arose from that inseparable connection; but it is nevertheless true, that it is the value of the improvement only, and not the earth itself, that is individual property. Every proprietor, therefore, of cultivated land, owes to the community a *ground-rent*, for I know no better term to express the idea by, for the land which he holds; and it is from this ground-rent that the fund proposed in this plan is to issue.

It is deducible, as well from the nature of the thing, as from all the histories transmitted to us, that the idea of landed property commenced with cultivation, and that there was no such thing as landed property before that time. It could not exist in the first state of man, that of hunters; it did not exist in the second state, that of shepherds: neither Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or Job, so far as the history of the Bible may be credited in probable things, were owners of land. Their property consisted, as is always enumerated, in flocks and herds, and they travelled with them from place to place. The frequent contentions at that time about the use of a well in the dry country of Arabia, where those people lived, shew also there was no landed property. It was not admitted that land could be located as property.

There could be no such thing as landed property originally. Man did not make the earth, and though he had a natural right to *occupy* it, he had no right to *locate* as *his property* in perpetuity any part of it; neither did the Creator of the earth open a land-office, from whence the first title-deeds should issue.—From whence then arose the idea of landed property? I answer as before, that when cultivation began, the idea of landed property began with it; from the impossibility of separating the improvement made by cultivation from the earth itself upon which that improvement was made. The value of the improvement so far exceeded the value of the natural earth, at that time as to absorb it; till, in the end, the common right of all became confounded into the cultivated right of the individual. But they are, nevertheless, distinct species of rights, and will continue to be so as long as the world endures.

It is only by tracing things to their origin, that we can gain rightful ideas of them ; and it is by gaining such ideas that we discover the boundary that divides right from wrong, and which teaches every man to know his own. I have entitled this tract *Agrarian Justice*, to distinguish it from *Agrarian Law*. Nothing could be more unjust than *Agrarian Law* in a country improved by cultivation ; for though every man as an inhabitant of the earth, is a joint proprietor of it in its natural state, it does not follow that he is a joint proprietor of cultivated earth. The additional value made by cultivation, after the system was admitted, became the property of those who did it, or who inherited it from them, or who purchased it. It had originally an owner. Whilst, therefore, I advocate the right and interest myself in the hard case of all those who have been thrown out of their natural inheritance by the introduction of the system of landed property, I equally defend the rights of the possessor to the part which is his.

Cultivation is, at least, one of the greatest natural improvements ever made by human invention. It has given to created earth a ten-fold value. But the landed monopoly, that began with it, has produced the greatest evil. It has dispossessed more than half the inhabitants of every nation of their natural inheritance, without providing for them, as ought to have been done, an indemnification for that loss ; and has thereby created a species of poverty and wretchedness that did not exist before.

In advocating the case of the persons thus dispossessed, it is a right and not a charity that I am pleading for. But it is that kind of right which, being neglected at first, could not be brought forward afterwards, till heaven had opened the way by a revolution in the system of government. Let us then do honour to revolutions by justice, and give currency to their principles by blessings.

### TAXATION OR PROTECTION

(From the leading article in the DAILY NEWS, February 15th)

From whence are the new resources to come ? From possessions or from consumption ? The Protectionists are in full cry after their favourite quarry, and some of the weak-kneed Free Traders are joining them. The SPECTATOR is alarmed at the idea of making further demands on the taxpayer and, throwing over all its economic commonsense, calls for a ten per cent, *ad valorem* duty on all imports, food, raw material, manufactures—everything. We are to make all that we consume dearer in order that we may keep the taxes of the rich and the well-to-do lower. We are to consolidate our alliance with France and Russia and Italy by putting a tax on their exports in place of the free market we gave them when they were not our Allies. We are to reward the Overseas Dominions for their sacrifices by protecting the home producer against them. They will have a preferential tax as compared with France, but they will be taxed where hitherto they have had the privilege of free trade. The suggestion that this is to be done to reduce imports is obviously insincere. The way to reduce imports is to make them illegal in so far as they are unnecessary.

There is no question of taxing German trade, for we have no trade with Germany to tax. It will be time enough for us to decide whether we are to enter on an economic war with Germany when we have won the war on the battlefield. Till then at least let us avoid putting duties on our Allies' goods in order to save the pockets of the rich by making the general cost of living higher than the unavoidable conditions of the war make it. If we are to fight the Protection fallacy again let it be a fair fight and not a stampede on a false issue.

### IS POLITICAL ECONOMY SCIENCE OR PURE FAKE ?

(ALEXANDER MACKENDRICK in the SINGLE TAX REVIEW, January—February, 1916.)

In the last issue of the REVIEW you have headed an editorial with the above suggestive question. You may not be aware that a few years ago a debate extending over some months was carried on in the pages of one of the heavier London magazines, by Dr. John Beattie Crozier and Mr. H. G. Wells, under substantially the same title, "Is a science of Sociology possible ?" The first named economist maintained that sociology is a real science and can be securely established on certain natural human instincts or tendencies, while Mr. Wells insisted that owing to the fact that man is still in the making and always developing new and unpredictable qualities, no uniformity in his reactions to stimuli can reasonably be expected, and that therefore the basis of a true science is wanting. Mr. Wells then went on to argue, as readers of his books can imagine he would, that all that the society reconstructor can do is to proceed by the empirical method of picturing to himself ideal states or utopias and then endeavouring to mould society after the pattern he has set for himself. It is needless to say that both these distinguished writers urged their cases ably, and had Dr. Crozier been not only the broad and liberal thinker that he is, but a Single Taxer in addition, his triumph in the debate would have been complete. Lacking as it did, however, the precipitating reagent which the Single Tax philosophy provides, his collection of so-called principles seemed to produce a muddled mixture which might well have evoked just the question asked by your article.

To me it has always seemed that the whole difficulty arises from a failure to realize what at bottom a science really is. We should constantly remind ourselves that we use language wrongly when we speak of a science of engineering or a science of government. A science is not a statement of what man can, would, or should do, but is a formula describing the tendencies of natural forces acting either without obstruction, or modified by the tendencies of other natural forces. Astronomy may be regarded as the purest science we have knowledge of, for it tells only of the natural laws which regulate the movements of the Heavenly bodies, and which cannot be modified or altered by human action. If we were as watchful of our language as we should be, we would speak of all human achievements as "arts," with the purpose of distinguishing them clearly from Nature's unchangeable operations which, when reduced to formulae, are properly termed "science."

The mistake into which all the orthodox economists fell was that of starting their observations and beginning their search for first principles at a point where natural law had already been interfered with and where artificial law had given some men the power to obstruct the natural tendency of man to satisfy his desires with the least expenditure of effort. When the "science" of economics was born and began to look around for its subject-matter, it failed to observe that the "art" of government had arrived first and had disturbed and confused the data on which such a science must depend for support. The consequences have been just what might have been expected. The muddledom as between natural and artificial conditions on which the original observations were made, and from which subsequent deductions were drawn, has become worse at every attempt to simplify the "science" which is neither a true science nor an art, but an irreconcilable compound of the two. The most remarkable example of the confusion that has been caused by this failure to distinguish between two utterly different categories is to be found in a little manual of political economy by Professor J. Shield Nicolson, of Edinburgh University. In an apparent unconsciousness that he has wandered far out