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Charles Abrams, Consultant to the U. S. Housing Authority, has made a gallant effort to do for Henry George what Karl Marx is said to have done for Hegel—turn him upside down or right side up, according to how you look at it. But Hegel dealt in lofty metaphysics, and in that rarified atmosphere right side up or upside down is sometimes one and the same; nebulosity is still nebulosity.

"Revolution in Land" (Harper & Brothers, \$3.00) has been advertised as "a thoroughly fresh analysis of why access to the land is so expensive for homes, farms, and every use; may well be for our day what 'Progress and Poverty' was for its." The man who wrote that piece knew little about Abrams' book and nothing about "Progress and Poverty." However, that is only partially his fault, for the author of "Revolution in Land," despite his meticulous traffic in statistical trivia, is still tentative, contradictory and even downright fanciful in effect if not in intent.

For one thing, Abrams makes no distinction between "land" "real estate" "property" and "agriculture." In all his theoretical discussions these terms are used interchangeably, so that the reader, if otherwise unfamiliar with economic terminology, might easily accept this syno-

nymity and suffer harrowing logico-economic paroxysms as a consequence.

According to the book, land is in oversupply; we have so much of it, and so many different people own it, that the monopoly element formerly attached to land is gone forever. Indeed, if only the government had sense enough to do so "it should be possible to acquire much land on extremely favorable terms." For what purpose, you might ask, should the government acquire land? The answer is simple: the government, having ruined land values through discriminatory and excessive property taxation, should now step in and restore order from chaos. How can this be done? Here is what Abrams, with becoming vagueness, offers as one of "a few extremely tentative suggestions": "If the government

were to enter what is now the limited-dividend field, it could appreciably reduce waste and ultimate development cost and each five percent or more on funds borrowed at two percent or so."

Abrams likes planning. He has faith in the "government." He reposes an impressive confidence in it: "the government must be consistent. Consistent not in the narrow sense, but in the sense that its policies must be coherent, coordinated, integrated. One action must not cancel out another. The government must know where it is going, what it is doing, why it is doing it." Who this mysteriously omniscient "government" is he does not say; he is for it anyhow. There should be a plan: "A logical plan (that) would coordinate the scattered activities of RFC, PWA, FCA, HOLC, FHA, USHA, AAA, TUA, REA, FSA, and a host of others. . . ." Other desirable objectives are: "a decentralized but coordinated administration"; "an expanding area of federal control"; and "mandatory control over . . . productive capacity." Also, the author is confident that "the use of land can be organized far more effectively, by reason of public ownership, than in any other way." At any rate, "such control will be much less expensive than that of AAA." A laborious reading of 308 jejune pages revealed nothing more specific than such generalizations.

Abrams comes by his conclusions, honestly, for in his scheme of things there is no law of rent. He denies the role of land as the primary source of wealth. He asserts that "surplus and not scarcity" is the central problem of our day. He tries to assure his readers that industry has been emancipated from "the tyranny of site." He asserts that an automotive plant "has nothing to do with land." The recital of upside-down opinions is so persistent that after a while I began to wonder whether I was reading an attempted grown up version of a book about the Land of Oz.

Nothing but a book of equal or greater length could list in detail the basic theoretical misconceptions and obtuse observations which stamp every page in "Revolution in Land."

I must of course, waive such a task; but I do not do so in despair, for it is evident that not even "academic" economists will take this volume seriously. Certainly the "government" which Abrams approaches with such deferential confidence will not countenance for one fleeting second his proposal that property taxes be rescinded and replaced by levies exclusively on personality and production.

In the course of favorable comment on Abrams' book Lewis Mumford is quoted as saying that "the last really important word on social occupancy and control of land in America was written by Henry George in 1879." This will be news to readers of *The Freeman*. Terms such as "social occupancy" and "control of land" were, as followers of George know well enough, anathema to the author of "Progress and Poverty."

On the question of rent itself Abrams likewise misconstrues the Georgist doctrine. He refers to Henry George as "denouncing all rent as medieval and unjust," and from such fundamental ineptitude arises his maladroit handling of the whole land problem. George did not "denounce" rent—to do so would be to deny the very base of his economics. But let Ely, an unfriendly critic of George tell the story: "It must be remembered that Henry

George did not propose to abolish rent—an obvious impossibility—but simply to do away with the private receipt of rent. This would prevent the withholding of land from use for purely speculative purposes. . . ."

"I do not propose," wrote George, "either to purchase or to confiscate private property in land. . . . Let the individuals who now hold it still retain, if they want to, possession of what they are pleased to call their land. . . . Let them buy and sell, and bequeath and devise it. . . . It is not necessary to confiscate land; it is only necessary to confiscate rent."

O si sic omnia.