

Who Is the Tyrant?

by URQUHART ADAMS

IT IS sad but true that emotion often precludes thought. This is evident in social and political propaganda where the most preposterous statements are often made with a straight face.

The issue between socialists and communists on the one hand, for instance, and Georgists on the other, has to do primarily with who is "the villain of the piece," the capitalist or the landowner. The communists (socialists are only communists with cold feet) hold that labor is exploited by capitalists — while the Georgists hold that the landowners are the exploiters.

All wealth is produced by labor, generally assisted by capital, from land. Even a communist knows that, although the head of the Communist party in Canada once told me, "we don't use land any more, we make everything with machines." But for any reasonable person it is clear that all wealth is produced by labor from land. Ergo: give labor free access to land, and labor can produce its own capital—capital being a form of wealth—and bypass the capitalist whose capital, being perishable, will rot or rust unless labor will agree to use it. Capitalists cannot exploit labor except under conditions that make it difficult for labor to use land, but such conditions prevail almost everywhere because of taxation that often makes it profitable to hold land for speculation.

If this is true, and who can doubt it, the interests of capitalists and laborers are the same, and both are exploited by the landowners. The capitalist and landowner, however, are often one and the same person. The man who owns valuable land can easily get money with which to buy capital (machines) to take the place of a labor force. He acts on this and immediately laborers see the machine as their en-

emy, depriving them of a chance to make a living. Then someone tells them that the machine is capital and they conclude, naturally enough, that capitalists are exploiting them—while all the time the landowner is denying them the right to a living unless they pay him the larger part of what they produce, in rent.

When men get tired of producing for the benefit of others they revolt. It could happen here in Canada, although it is not liable to happen soon because we still have a vast expanse of unoccupied land to the north of us that will be brought into production gradually as a safety valve against social explosions.

Of course it is the system we should oppose and not the individual owners of land, even though, generally speaking, it is the members of the land owning class who support the system and resist any attempt to adopt a sane fiscal policy.

It would be no more difficult to collect ground rents to finance government equitably than it is now to collect rents for private profit. It has been done before, even here in Alberta, with tremendous benefits to the general public.

And England's whole revenue for a thousand years, according to Lord Macaulay and John Richard Greene, eminent English historians, was derived from one single tax on the rental value of land. During that thousand years England played a leading role in continental affairs, and was the only country that did not adopt some form of slavery.

In the end all tyrants, by whatever name they are called, are overthrown. Emotion rages, reason fades and reigns of terror run their course as history grimly repeats itself.