

# Landlordism and Communism

Speech by Robert Benton at Columbus, Ohio, April 26, 1953

THE beliefs in communism and landlordism have achieved such popularity around the world that it is only proper that students of social philosophy should analyze and compare these ideologies, just as they seek to understand the differences between communism and capitalism, or the differences between landlordism and capitalism.



Robert Benton

A generally accepted definition of communism is the "belief that government should own and control the production and distribution of wealth" and landlordism may be defined as the belief that the individual land-title-holder should receive that part of distribution of wealth known as economic rent or land value.

Now, inasmuch as these two definitions do not seem to coincide, let us see if there is any basic similarity upon analysis. Whenever the government steps in to manage production and distribution of wealth it is trying to do something, artificially and arbitrarily, which could and would be done naturally and automatically. And in spite of all the professed platitudes for the common good, government is still empowered by individuals who will seek to satisfy their own desires with the least exertion and whose desires are unlimited.

Such official individuals who have assumed authority either by delegation from the people or by usurpation can only act and react as human beings and in response to the invariable principle of human action, that of obtaining the most possible for the least possible. Only the very naive and unobserving can deny this principle. So we see that individuals in charge of such a mountainous and impossible task as controlling the production and ownership of products, would grant themselves certain privileges and monopolies over their fellows.

A bureaucrat must be overpaid because only competition can set prices. Applied communism has been marked by privileges and monopolies of one sort or another from the earliest experiments to the present time. Since the distribution of wealth is not allowed according to competitive freedom, it cannot be a just distribution of wealth to the producer of that wealth.

Now let us see if this bears any similarity to landlordism. The essence of landlordism is that the individual title-holder should receive a distribution of wealth without producing it. A title-holder produces nothing as a mere holder of a title and the argument that the landlord may also be a producer, such as a laborer or a capitalist, does not justify the wealth he is privileged to obtain as a result of the mere title.

Whenever an individual can obtain wealth, by means of only a government-enforced title to the natural earth, he is getting something for nothing, and that is enjoying a privilege over his fellows. The privileged bureaucrat under communism is not different from the privileged aristocrat under landlordism. Both reap without

sowing, although both may contend that they "furnish means of production."

Of course, students of political economy realize that the creation of the earth was natural and did not need to be planned by individuals. Likewise the creation of capital is naturally supplied, where needed, without plans and planners. The landlord's accumulation of wealth is at the expense of the capitalist and laborer. Landlordism is as much an enemy of capitalism as is communism. Landlordism fights capitalism at every step of production and, as has happened in older countries where landlordism is strongest, may eliminate the capitalist process completely. Both communism and landlordism seek to entrench themselves by monopolistic measures, even to the use of force to perpetuate themselves in power. Both like planned economy and both like to share the wealth.

Capitalism never had a proper chance. All mediums of education and communication are used to stunt inquiry and to avoid self-criticism. As economic freedom is non-existent under both systems, so the other freedoms of press, religion and speech are also at a premium. Both have their privileged and under-privileged, the privileged working to maintain the systems and the under-privileged working to maintain them both. Both of them deny that the full product should belong to the producer, they also deny there is any such thing as a natural law determining distribution of wealth. They both discourage the production of things which satisfy human desires and lower wages and interest to the point of mere maintenance.

## Sisters Under the Skin

Instead of being opposing philosophies they are essentially united in holding that wealth may be enjoyed by others than the producer. Both systems ignore the natural difference between individually-created values and publicly-created values. Both exact ruinous taxes against the producer, destroying the producer's accumulation of wealth for his economic independence. The producer's ability to have his wealth for the future is lost and he becomes a cog in machinery and economically dependent forever. When the few become privileged and the many become under-privileged, moral decay sets in, mental power wanes, culture is lost. Crime increases and vice spreads to all levels of conduct. More and more control seems to be required to continue production, and those in power are quick to supply it. But as more regimentation is applied, the desire for change becomes stronger and often an entire people will make a superficial change from landlordism to communism, as the first settlers did in this country, and then return to a landlordism patterned after the same thing they sought to escape.

In more recent times whole nations, seeking to drop the yoke of landlordism, have been led by a trick into communism as in the Soviet Republic. England too, seems to be tottering towards communism and landlordism. In fact, the same beliefs can be, and often are, practiced to some extent in the same country at the same time. In this country, we now practice landlordism when we subsidize individual landholders about four-fifths of the land value which the entire public has created. At the same time we practice communism by taxing the producer's

(Continued on Page Six, Column One)

## Landlordism and Communism

(Continued from Page Three)

ability so as to pay others for not working, for agricultural subsidies, educational benefits, government housing, social security and the like. But the principle remains the same in both landlordism and communism. They are devices for getting something for nothing and they perpetuate the injustice whereby an individual may reap where he has not sown. One philosophy is as much to be feared as the other, one is as dangerous to humanity and the continuity of civilization as the other. Both are disrespectful of equal human rights of the producer to his product.

The alternative to the robbery of both landlordism and communism is well understood by students of economic freedom and justice, and should be understood by the people at large. For, instead of this being complicated or difficult of belief, a mere glance clarifies it. The first requisite of economic freedom may be reduced to a formula—stop subsidizing individual title-holders with land values the entire public has created, and begin using those values only for things which of themselves possess the ability to be enjoyed publicly, which may satisfy private human desires at the same time they are being used publicly. Also, the producer must be relieved of all taxation on his production and allowed to retain 100 per cent of the wealth he was created—either to consume directly—to save—or to help him produce more wealth as he may see fit. Then, and only then will freedom and justice become possible and the twin criminals of landlordism and communism be abolished.