

## Justice Vs. Monopoly By H. D. BUTLER

**D**URING the 18th century primarily because of the industrial revolution and man's awareness of the inequities of life, social reformers, statesmen and philosophers devoted themselves to the study of the cause of this phenomenon. Henry George was such a man.

It was natural to expect at the beginning of this era that labor-saving inventions would lighten the toil and improve the condition of the laborer; that enormous increase in the power of producing wealth would make real poverty a thing of the past; poverty being the inability to command the goods and services for the necessities of life.

Hence, George raises the question at the outset of his book, "Why, in spite of increase in productive power, do wages tend to a minimum which will give but a bare living?" This is the 'problem of the Sphinx' which George faced and solved.

Walking the streets on a visit to New York City he saw fabulous wealth, the wealth of Monte Cristo, on Fifth Avenue. Right beside it he saw poverty and degradation, want and shame, jails and slums, a condition which made him sick at heart.

### *The Question Filled His Life*

Why, in so bountiful a land, with enough and more than enough for all, should there be such inequality? Heaped-up wealth interlocked with deep and debasing want raised the question. "Why should strong men look for work, women faint with hunger and little ones spend the morning of life on the treadmill of toil?" Was this the natural order of things? No, George could not believe it and there, on the sidewalks of New York, he dedicated himself and vowed he would not rest until he had found the cause of, and if possible, the remedy for this depressing poverty amid advancing wealth.

One day, George, riding horseback in California, rode far out into the country, and stopping to rest his horse, met a teamster with whom he struck up a conversation, remarking about all the vacant land and asking what land was worth there. Pointing to some cows grazing afar off, the teamster replied, "I don't know exactly, but there is a man over there who will sell some land for a thousand dollars an acre." Like a flash it came to him that here was the reason for increasing poverty and advancing wealth. With the growth of population land grows in value, and the men who work it must pay for the privilege.

George spent a lifetime in solving this problem. He accepted Riccardo's law of rent and correlated it with the law of wages. He found the rent (that which is paid for the use of the land) depends on land values, which, created by the people of community, belongs to the community; that wages, produced by the individual, belong to the individual and no man or state has a right to take them from him. Conversely, no man has a right to take that which belongs to the community. Land values capitalized as rent should be paid into the public treasury and not to any individual.

When land is held out of use for a rise, to be sold to the highest bidder, then someone is denied an opportunity to the use of the land on which he can make a living. Speculation in land and land monopoly are the causes of our

present condition. In New York City alone there are 10,000 acres of idle land, valuable land. Make these idle acres available to those who will use them, collecting the rent for the community and letting the owner keep for himself ALL that he produces, (i. e. all buildings, improvements, etc., to be tax free) then, imagine the great increase in jobs and business!

Space permits mention only of a few outstanding examples of land monopoly in New York City; the land, owned by the Vanderbilts, on which stands the Grand Central Station and much of Park Avenue up to and including the Waldorf. The Duke of Roxboro owns 62nd Street between Lexington and Third Avenues; the King of England owns a plot on Fifth Avenue near the Public Library. \$75,000,000 in land rents pass through a big National Bank in New York City to be paid to the Bank of England to be distributed to English landlords.

Many of these examples were taken from Margaret Bateman's book, *Whose World and Economics Simplified* by Bowen & Busby. Other examples are: The Pacific Railroads in the West own or control much of the mining, oil and timber lands. In Northwest California, six individuals own 70 per cent of the timber land; in southwest Washington, two men own 40 per cent, in West Oregon, five individuals own 36 per cent, and in north central Iowa, four persons own 56 per cent of the timber lands. One half of Florida is owned by 182 men whose combined holdings amount to 16,900,000 acres and in New York State the late Honorable James Wadsworth owned 29 square miles of land between Rochester and Geneseo. If one wished to live or work there, he first came to terms with the Baron of Geneseo; or if he wanted to build a home, he went first to see the timber monopolists.

In 1935 Rutgers University made a survey and found that in New Jersey there were 2,600,000 acres of land *better* than pasture land of which only 750,000 acres were in use. This is less than 29 per cent of the land in use—more than two-thirds of the land in Jersey idle! Imagine the results if two-thirds of the State of New Jersey were thrown open to settlement and improved for home, business, industries and apartments! (Good slum clearance). Pay the rent only to the community and NO taxes on the improvements (each man has the right to his production), then the boom of building and business, with greatly increased production would stagger the imagination. Its effects would be felt in many places far outside of New Jersey.

The identification of the cause that associates poverty with progress points to the remedy; as George states it, "Make land common property," that is, the rent to be paid to the community, all improvements and wages to be kept by the owner, tax free. This must not be confused with the nationalization of land.

That remedy makes opportunity available to all so men can exercise their God-given right to the use of the land and so provide for themselves. George's solution raises the question of justice, and the inquiry passes into the field of ethics, thence into the field of statesmanship. For the denial of man's rights leads to dictatorships and statism, with man becoming a slave of the state in which he has no rights which the state is bound to respect.