

## The Road to Realisation

By A. J. CARTER

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WHEN I recall the prejudices that I had during my schooldays I am appalled. Superficial ideas of utopianism, atheism, free love, and intellectual snobbery were mingled together and spiced with feelings of bitterness and revolt. I was a misfit at school, disliking the childishness, and searching for the maturity which alone seemed to merit the respect of the adult world which I longed to join. I wanted to earn money, and to become a citizen; the latter desire made me, for some years, an ardent advocate of lowering the voting age.

So I left school as soon as I could, and sat an examination for entry into the civil service. While waiting for the results to be announced I took what was to be a temporary job with a large mining finance company; eight years later, with all thoughts of the civil service abandoned, I am still there. The company, in the meantime, has grown steadily larger and richer.

I shall always remember my boss's first words: "So you are so devoid of talents that you want to work in an office." It is fair comment on office life generally, but in spite of that I spent two years and a half developing a great loyalty to my employers, which I retained through the succeeding two years of national service. On one occasion I even defended the giant diamond monopoly!

This primitive loyalty did not long survive my return from the army. Without the spur of competition, large organisations become a law unto themselves; they develop a power which dangerously restricts the freedom of the societies in which they operate. Sometimes it is said that monopoly is an inevitable consequence of free enterprise competition, but in fact the two are directly opposed. Competition helps the ordinary man; monopoly nearly always exploits him.

A few days after I began working for my living I saw a poster advertising a course of economics, and thought that some instruction in the subject would be useful to a young man starting in the City. Accordingly I enrolled at the School of Economic Science in Suffolk Street, and so came into contact with one of the most important influences on my development.

The man behind the school is a former tutor at the Henry George School, and it was in Suffolk Street that I first came across the idea of land-value tax and heard

of *Progress and Poverty*, a second-hand copy of which I later bought and (more surprisingly) read. In this way a vital seed was sown, but it was not yet to flower. At the time, it was not in economics but in philosophy that the influence was greatest; attendance at the school's philosophy classes, directly and indirectly, altered my whole outlook on the deepest aspects of life.

A seventeen I was sympathetic to pacifism and later to vegetarianism, though I embraced neither of these ideas, and have since come to accept the concept of a just war. I also did a little writing, and spent a good deal of time editing and typing a small magazine (circulation five!). Few end products of any value emerged from this, but the experience was useful. However, in due course, the time came for these childish things to be put away.

Meanwhile, two different feelings, or realisations, came to me. One day, fairly suddenly, I realised that individuals matter; that every man and woman, however seemingly misguided, is entitled to respect. Ever since then I have believed firmly in the right of the individual to himself, and in democracy, which follows from this right. Today democracy is failing, because officials are taking decisions instead of the people themselves. Experts should inform, but they should not decide; when they decide it is usually a mark of their failure to inform.

My other feeling was for the essential *worthwhileness* of civilisation—the realisation that when, for example, one listens to Mozart in the Royal Festival Hall one is doing something that matters, and that humanity has achieved something of intrinsic value. The quest for worthwhileness is a part of each of us, and without mental and spiritual nourishment the mind of a man rots.

The first of these feelings, in particular, was accentuated by life in the army where, after three months at the inevitable Aldershot, I graduated to the comfort and boredom of the War Office, and lived in digs instead of barracks. The house was right opposite the railway and shook violently every time a train passed. The landlady was a kindly soul who, no doubt out of pure sympathy for homeless soldiers, was known on occasion to have crammed as many as eighteen of us into her five "compact" bedrooms. This experience confirmed my respect for those whose ways of life and standards of behaviour

were different from my own.

It was while I was in the army that two important things happened. In April, 1958, during a week's holiday in Wales, I met the girl who, two years and two months later, was to become my wife. There was a feeling, right from the beginning, of uniqueness, and this intensified my belief in the purposefulness of nature—not in a pre-determined and unalterable fate but rather in a design or destiny. And just as one may feel a personal destiny, so one can also see destinies—designs, patterns, call them what you will—in nature as a whole.

In June of the same year my political thoughts, which were by then in the Liberal direction, were brought to sharp focus by a forceful attack on the Liberals in a letter in *The Times*, to which I sent a reply (drafted angrily on the back of an old envelope) which was also published, to my great surprise and, I must admit, delight. As a result of this I was invited to join the Liberal International, and membership of the Liberal Party soon followed.

One day in the *Liberal News* I saw an advertisement for a free issue of *The Free Trader*. In *The Free Trader* I saw an advertisement for free copies of *LAND & LIBERTY*. In *LAND & LIBERTY* I saw an advertisement for free courses in economics at the Henry George School, and as land-value taxation touched a chord I resolved to find out more about it. I was, I suppose, one of the few people to attend a Basic Course who already knew about land-value taxation and had read *Progress and Poverty*, but it did not mean very much to me then.

My progress through the Basic Course was like climbing a ladder placed against a high brick wall. Each lesson took me a step higher, until one evening—I cannot remember whether it was the seventh or the eighth lesson—the next step enabled me also to see over the wall. The steps are firmly rational, but the looking over the wall is something more: there is a leap of the mind; something is seen that previously, because of the barrier, was unseen. Another analogy would be the gradual drawing together of two wires to complete an electric circuit. They are moved closer at a roughly even pace, but suddenly, when they reach a certain distance, a spark flies from one to the other. Contact is made; the gap is bridged; the mind jumps from what it has learnt to what is then revealed to it as truth.

I am by nature a conservative, preferring what has evolved to what is newly created, but the conviction was strong enough to turn me into a radical. Once when talking to a friend I mentioned when I had "got hold of" the idea of land-value taxation. "You mean," he remarked, "when the idea got hold of you."

There were still many rough edges — points I did not understand, reservations, prejudices not fully eradicated—but I was already committed, and another Basic Course, two weekend schools, a tutors' training course, and a social evening later, I found myself reaching the decision that I must offer my services as a tutor. Earlier

I had been horrified at the thought of taking a class, but the time ripened, and one cold January evening my wife and I waited in the local library wondering who—if anyone—would turn up. In fact, so many people came that we soon ran out of lesson sheets and almost out of chairs; my total enrolment was 51, which I imagine must be an all-time record!

During my spell as a tutor my focus of interest has shifted from the real and acute problem of how to "put across" our ideas to the nature of that free and healthy society towards which, each in his own way, we are all working. For this reason, while recognising the tactical necessity to advocate site value rating and a limited land value tax without prejudicing the case by giving the impression of extremism, I am a confirmed believer in the ultimate goal of a single tax. To my mind it is not enough to argue that only when the whole of the rent of land is taken should taxes on wages and interest be considered; such taxes are acknowledged violations of private property, and should *never* be considered. If we achieve a 100 per cent. land value tax and still have other taxes only half our goal will have been won.

What is our goal? It is to secure the equal rights of all men to the use of land, without which they cannot live, by means of a tax equal to the full market value payable by the occupier for the privilege of possession. It is also to secure to the individual the full fruit of his labour, whether in the direct form of wages or the indirect form of interest, and to abolish all hindrances in the way of his exchanging or otherwise disposing of his property as he thinks fit. It is thus to create the correct *relationship* between the community and the individual. For this reason, the two ideals cannot be isolated from one another; for the *relationship* to be correct, both must be attained.

I, personally speaking, together with many others, do not expect to see this goal realised. It may be hundreds of years before it is even approached. But we do what we can with a great faith in the future, because we know that we are working for a truth, and that one day that truth will be received.



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