

How England Lost Its Liberty

By Paul M. Clemens

The accompanying diagram illustrates how the English landlords rid themselves of their duty to provide a 'supply for the king's larder,' or, as we would say, to pay rent to the king. That duty was the condition upon which the landlords were granted their sinecures and made the guardians of the land of England by William the Conqueror.

From the year of the conquest (1066) to the signing of The Great Charter of King John (1215), when the reins of government were seized by the landlords, rent paid for public services: there were no taxes. But the next year the landlords began the process of shifting the burden to labor. That year it was that "England's woes began," as Oliver Goldsmith so aptly put it*. Through the following six centuries the landlords progressively repudiated their obligation. The shifting of the burden from land to labor, encouraging land speculation, was accompanied by drastic labor and peasant legislation and every conceivable act of

tyranny. (Hence the name "torys," or tyrants, by which they and their partizans are known to this day.) Thus was the working population reduced to a condition of serfdom, resulting in labor and peasant revolts and in civil wars.

In the course of a speech delivered in the House of Commons December 17, 1845, Richard Cobden, the great English free trade advocate, offered the following explanation of this diagram:

"For a period of 150 years after the Conquest, the whole of the revenue of the country was derived from the land. During the next 150 years it yielded nineteen-twentieths of the revenue—for the next century down to the reign of Richard III, it was nine-tenths. During the next 70 years to the time of Mary it fell to about three-fourths. From this time to the end of the Commonwealth, land appeared to have yielded one-half the revenue. Down to the reign of Anne it was one-fourth. In the reign of George III it was one-sixth. For the first thirty years of his reign the land yielded one-seventh of the revenue. From 1798 to 1816 (during the period of

the Land Tax), land contributed one-ninth, from which time to the present (1845) one twenty-fifth only of the revenue had been derived directly from land. Thus the land, which anciently paid the whole of taxation, paid now only a fraction, or one twenty-fifth, notwithstanding the immense increase that had taken place in the value of the rentals. The people had fared better under the despotic monarchs than when the powers of the State had fallen into the hands of a land oligarchy, who had first exempted themselves from taxation, and next claimed compensation for themselves by a Corn Law for their heavy and peculiar burdens."

Does this diagram contain a lesson for the United States?

Decidedly so!

Most of our political, legal and economic institutions have come from Europe, especially England. They were brought to these shores by the Pilgrims in the Mayflower, and they continued to arrive with every boat which followed thereafter. The colonial governments ruled according to English precedents.

In their new environment the colonists had access to unlimited natural resources. Rent and taxes, being low, could not immediately become instruments of oppression. As material progress advanced and land became more valuable, the very system of taxation from which they had run away was introduced in the colonies. The legalistic chicanery which had enslaved them was transplanted to these shores. It has continued to enslave us to this day.

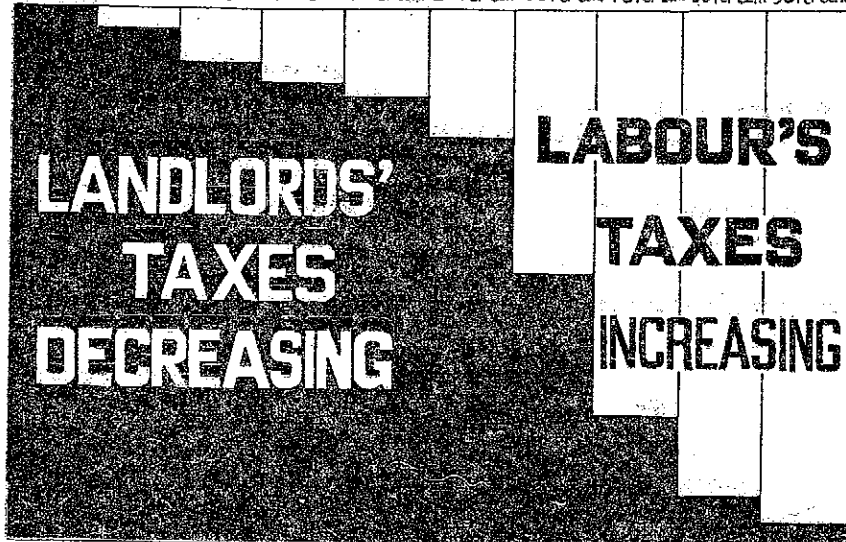
Every fiscal law enacted by our town and city councils, our legislatures and congress, is but an extension of the legislation established in 1216 by the English landlord barons.

* A time there was 'ere England's woes began.

When every rood of ground maintained its men.

From "The Deserted Village"

1216 1366 1483 1553 1653 1714 1760 1793 1815 1845
0 Per Cent 4 Per Cent 11 Per Cent 14 Per Cent 17 Per Cent 25 Per Cent 50 Per Cent 70 Per Cent 90 Per Cent 95 Per Cent



Copied from an old diagram — Paul M. Clemens Delineator