

## **What Now?**

By Mike Curtis 11-24-25

Long before Trump was elected the first time, the American dream had become just that. Wages had been stagnant since the early 70s, millions were functionally unemployable (didn't qualify or needed subsidized pay). The cost of healthcare and medical insurance had already been rising faster than inflation.

What gains there were from higher wages, government subsidies, increased funding for schools, improvements in infrastructure and public transportation, cars with improved millage and less maintenance, more efficient heating and cooling systems, vinyl siding, fiberglass roofing, and cheaper imports were captured by the increase in housing rents or the purchase price of housing.

Donald Trump, the business man, campaigned on the promise that he would solve our intractable problems of jobs, wages, and housing. Seventy seven million people voted for Trump, and that is the reason many did. Two hundred and thirty nine million people were eligible to register and vote. Thirty three percent chose Trump. Sixty six percent either voted for his opponent, or didn't like any candidate enough to register and vote.

Now, a year after he won the presidency for the second time, and his party won the House and the senate, things are slowly getting worse. Inflation is up to three percent. They're spending billions on deporting undocumented workers, disrupting communities and reducing cooperation. They're cutting back on government programs that redistribute wealth, and increasing the hardships of the poor. They're imposing tariffs on imports, and diminishing consumption.

Tariffs increase the profits from making things in which people in other countries sell them cheaper. They enrich domestic manufacturers at the expense of consumers and total production. All trade is an activity in which everyone gets back more than they give. It is the life's blood of civilization.

The United States, as a whole, is one of the most sparsely populated industrial countries in the world. At the same time (according to Brookings), about 15% of large American cities are idle. Far more land is greatly underused. This means that our cities could employ and house another 40 million people or more if their land was put to its full potential. Idle and underused land causes unemployment, stagnant wages, and the ever increasing cost of housing. It is abundantly clear in cities and suburbs where enormous investments in

infrastructure and public service enable many times more people to live and cooperate per acre.

Consider the applications of computers, robotics, and artificial intelligence, and we would expect that every worker's life would be a holiday. What we get instead are more and more Billionaires, and more and more workers on the treadmill of life. Add the long commutes, and we are returning to the ten and twelve hour days and six day weeks of 1900 where the free market equaled Wage slavery.

After 250 years of technological progress where the results of labor have been multiplied ten, a hundred, and in some cases, a thousand times, wages are stagnant. For the least educated and skilled workers, wages (upon which all others are based) tend to an amount so low, that any further reduction would depress productivity, and that would reduce the income of employers. In reaction, Minimum Wage laws were enacted requiring far higher wages than people would continue working for.

With the exception of those who benefit from it and some who aspire to, we know the distribution of wealth is inequitable. Unfortunately, our intellectuals and reformers are still advocating interventions, redistributions, and the formation of Labor Unions.

Over and over again we have tried to elect a savior, and over and over again they has fallen short.

However, we could devise a system that gives everyone an equal opportunity; enables everyone to keep the wealth that can be attributed to their own exertions — what they could have produced by utilizing the natural opportunities that are equally available to all; and provides for government with socially created wealth.

Who would be against such an ideal? True, the vast majority of people have no idea what policies or laws would bring it about, and they do not believe the plutocracy would ever allow it to be adopted if they did. Yet, it is not quantum physics. We need only consider the things we are well aware of, and use the reasoning employed in our daily lives.

Whether the Earth belongs to one person or a billion people in a myriad of different sizes and values, it would make little difference to seven billion people who were landless. Some people receive part of what other people produce in exchange for the opportunity to live and work on part of the Earth, which has been here for billions of years. Having to give the results of your labor without receiving an equal value in exchange is the essence of slavery.

Even with a representative government like that of the United States, it is the independence of landowners and their unwarranted (something for nothing) incomes from land that brings them a disproportionate influence in governments. And this influence yields additional incomes with patents, franchises, and government contracts, as seen with pharmaceutical companies, private internet cables, and weapons makers. No one believes that the Earth or any part of it should be private property? No one believes that after government has funded the research and development of new life changing drugs, that the private companies receiving the funds should also get a patent denying others the right to produce a similar product? No one believes it is right for a private company to own and profit from the roads or pipes that enable us to travel or drink clean water. Yet, that is where we are headed.

Were the American people to explore the ramifications of our political institutions, the majority of citizens would not make the Earth private property. They would grant exclusive possession of land so that the products of labor: crops, mines, houses, and factories were securely in the possession of their rightful owners, but the title to land would be contingent upon the payment of its rental value. Let our government of the people, by the people, and for the people, administer this common

opportunity for the benefit of the people as a whole. That would give each landholder exclusive possession of his land, and yet satisfy all other people's common ownership to the same parcel.

Those who held land would put it to full use. Our cities and urban areas would be developed and redeveloped to their full potential. That would draw labor and capital from the least potentially productive land toward the densely populated cities. It would diminish the value of the less potentially productive land. It would create a free-land opportunity that would raise wages everywhere, as no one would work for others unless they were paid as much as they could have produced on the best land (natural opportunity) that was free.

It is easy to imagine that the free-land opportunity would soon be exhausted, but, almost all workers would be drawn to valuable lands, and the majority of workers would be drawn to the most valuable lands in urban areas. The payment of rent would encourage land holders to hire labor, amass capital, and maximize production in order to get the highest rewards for their entrepreneurial efforts.

Nearly a hundred and fifty years ago Henry George proposed the same program: Collect the rental value of land for social purpose. Abolish all other sources of

public revenue (taxes). Socialize (have government run) all businesses in which there cannot reasonably be competition, like the common roads. Abolish all government granted monopolies. Spend the revenue from the value of land to maintain the infrastructure and public service, the preservation of order, the administration of justice, national defense, the maintenance of those who are mentally and physically unable to take care of themselves. Devote the remainder of the rent to social programs. Today, that could include national healthcare, medical and environmental research, and the advance of civilization. That is the entire Georgist program.

It is easy to imagine that the administration of such a large public fund would lead to the same corrupting temptations that are present in government today. However, the fact that every person would have an independent opportunity to earn a living, eliminates the power of landlord employers over workers, and gives all people an interest in the affairs of government and society.

Our institution of private property in land foretells of our intractable problems of employment, low wages, and a shortage of housing. Tyranny is looming, and inevitable.

Democratic Socialism, is a reform now advocated to counteract the extreme exploitation and oppression of workers. In concept, it would have the government own the land and capital of the country (the means of production), and the people in government would be elected by the people democratically.

However, Senator Sanders, Congress women Cortez and Tlaibe, and Mayor Mamdani, prominent "Democratic Socialists" have in no way advocated socialism. They have advocated more interventions like higher Minimum Wages and rent controls, and more redistributions of wealth like free childcare and buses. While interventions and redistributions do ameliorate exploitation, they do not incentivize the creation of jobs or the construction of housing, essential to prosperity.

Real Socialism eliminates private exploitation, but It also eliminates the efficiencies of each person seeking to satisfy their desires with the least exertion in a free market. What the advocates of socialism observe as free market competition driving wages to a bare subsistence, is simply the result of a shortage of opportunities caused by land speculation (non-use and under-use of land) like musical chairs. With an abundance of job opportunities, the competition among

workers would simply direct each worker to their most rewarding application.

I have high hopes and low expectations that this idea will be promoted and considered in time. In 1935 in the middle of the Great Depression many of Henry George's disciples and followers were still alive. His books were still being read, and a one percent federal tax on the value of land was put forth in Congress. Combined with local real estate taxes, it could have possibly collected 25 or 30% of the rental value of land. It went nowhere in favor of the income tax, and the Depression continued until World War Two.

Another Recession is expected in 2026 or 2027, and sooner or later, the world will be engaged in another all-consuming useless war — fought over land. Whether it starts as an empire building conquest, or the counteraction to unemployment caused by idle land within a country, land is always the objective of war.

It is true: Many of the people who have read and attended programs on the Henry George thesis, have acknowledged they don't really understand it. Well, you can't really be for an idea or a concept if you don't understand it. So, please tell me what is it you don't understand? Is it that land is needed to live and work on, and a source of raw materials? Is it that wages

everywhere are determined by the best land that is freely available, and when there is no free land that is capable of yielding more than subsistence, the absence of free land drives free-market wages of the least valued workers to a bare subsistence; and beyond that, the more unused and underused land the more unemployed and homeless people? Is it that collecting the rental value of land for social purpose would create full employment, raise wages, and generate ample housing?

If you do understand it and support it, join me in communicating this program proposal to as many people as possible. It could go around the internet every bit as fast as any political proposal or scandalous story. It requires no religious faith or credentialed advocate — only the observations and reasoning of those who are capable of consecutive thought.

We are living in the aftermath of an 18th and 19th century conquest and genocide in which land is called property and treated as such. It enables exploitation, which engenders hoarding, which reduces cooperation and productivity as it drives wages to a minimum, causing unemployment and a shortage of housing with landowners and other monopolists taking whatever is left. We can work and hope for a benevolent dictator;

we can advocate for interventions and redistributions in which there are no fixed principles of what wages or housing rents should be, other than more and less. Or we can demand a socialist economy in which the Earth itself and every product used to produce more products (land, buildings, tools, machines, and inventories) are owned in common and the government becomes the universal employer; freedom and spontaneous cooperation are extinguished, and computers and bureaucrats direct the production and distribution of wealth.

In honor of the Semiquincentennial of the American revolution, I will end my thoughts with the words of Henry George from *Progress & Poverty*. It was written 1879, just over a hundred years after the Declaration of Independence.

"The reform I have proposed accords with all that is politically, socially, or morally desirable. It has the qualities of a true reform, for it will make all other reforms easier. What is it but the carrying out in letter and spirit of the truth enunciated in the Declaration of Independence—the "self-evident" truth that is the heart and soul of the Declaration —"That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable

rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness!"

These rights are denied when the equal right to land—on which and by which men alone can live—is denied. Equality of political rights will not compensate for the denial of the equal right to the bounty of nature. Political liberty, when the equal right to land is denied, becomes, as population increases and invention goes on, merely the liberty to compete for employment at starvation wages. This is the truth that we have ignored.

And so there come beggars in our streets and tramps on our roads; and poverty enslaves men who we boast are political sovereigns; and want breeds ignorance that our schools cannot enlighten; and citizens vote as their masters dictate; and the demagogue usurps the part of the statesman; and gold weighs in the scales of justice; and in high places sit those who do not pay to civic virtue even the compliment of hypocrisy; and the pillars of the republic that we thought so strong already bend under an increasing strain."

So, if you believe in equal opportunity, the right to keep what you produce, and the common right to socially created wealth, simply forward this writing.

Happy Thanksgiving,

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