

# PREFACE

*Make no small plans. Such plans do lack the heat that kindles flame.*

Shakespeare

In the culture from which present day society sprang, the great human tragedy occurred in the dim distant past, no doubt when some individuals, high up in the heirarchy of whatever authority existed at the time and perhaps commanding coercive power, came to understand that wealth, of whatever kind and degree, was a product of ownership of the land and its resources. To "own" land was to wield the power to exact tribute for access, directly or indirectly, from the entire community who cannot exist without it.

Thus was born the institution of private ownership of land. Those heretofore merely powerful now became the *rich* and powerful and that virtually without personal effort. Their ability to protect their privilege grew, first by force and ultimately by influencing the making of law and the organisation of society as it evolved into the State.

Since that time society has struggled, with little success, to deal with the miseries which have overwhelmed untold millions of people throughout the world - miseries directly attributable to the private monopoly of land.

There is little point in researching further the origins of this wretched institution. Unfortunately it carries the imprimatur of millennia of custom and usage. It is amply protected by man-made law in developed countries whilst in the still developing countries of the third world, land ownership is almost universally so firmly in the hands of

politically powerful minorities as to need little help even from law of their own making.

The poor have few options in redress which perhaps accounts for the extraordinarily uncritical acceptance of the regime under which they suffer. But equally extraordinary is the apparent inability of people, otherwise intelligent and thoughtful, to see the inequity in a system which thus condemns millions throughout the world to economic slavery even more pernicious than chattel slavery now universally abhorred.

Amongst those with eyes to see and ears to hear, minds to reason and hearts to bleed for the dispossessed, there is now an awakening to the need for reform. Unfortunately at the same time there springs in the hearts of the privileged the determination to defend those privileges which derive from land "ownership".

Around the world the demand for land rights becomes ever more strident. The possibility of eventual confrontation between the "haves" and the "have nots" on the land question awaits only an awakening by the landless masses to the enormity of the crime involved in the denial of what must surely be the most basic of human rights to share equitably in the bounty of the earth.

But that path to redress of a great wrong is fraught with danger and there is a peaceful alternative.

The direction of essential reform is clear and administratively simple. It is to apply the "user pays" principle so that landholders would pay to the community a rental for the exclusive occupancy and use of the land they hold. It would curtail the power of landholders to exploit society by wrongfully appropriating publicly created land values always enhanced through the growth of population and social development. It would nevertheless ensure the security of capital investment and the earnings of both capital and labour.

It would not redistribute present wealth in the manner advocated by some reformers. *Of vastly more importance would be the equitable distribution of opportunities to create wealth* so, in time, to destroy the excesses of unearned wealth at one end of the social scale and undeserved poverty at the other.

It may be thought an act of courage - or foolhardiness - to put forward proposals which challenge the formidable body of economists, themselves unable, or unwilling, to focus their talents on the most pressing problems of twentieth century society. But I am fortified by the knowledge that many economists and teachers of world repute together with any number of industrial and political leaders subscribe to the abolition of taxes and the substitution of site rental as the source of public tax revenues.

No doubt there are also numbers of academics who accept the principle but prefer silence to the thoughtless derision of their contemporaries.

This volume is written to encourage objective thinking amongst those troubled about the unhappy state of society who ask the questions but hear no answers. In the closing years of the 20th century it seeks to give political credibility to a time honoured philosophy which must now find expression in far reaching economic and social reform.