

A Fable—by Kate de Fremery

THOUSANDS of years ago ants were intelligent. They had an advanced technology and a complex language. They also had widespread poverty, but little was done about this until an adventuresome ant named Howard discovered an unpopulated island. Some ants, seeing a chance to begin a civilization without injustice, immediately organized a colonizing expedition.

Once in the boat, arguments arose among various factions as they discussed plans for establishing justice. Howard said that every ant should be allowed to keep everything he made or earned, but that everything not individually created should be held in common by the whole community. He said this was the only way to prevent special privileges and injustice.

His proposal stirred noisy protests. "You mean all land, for instance, would be held in common? That sounds like socialism," one spokesman said. "No, no," said others. "This plan is not socialistic enough. All factories would be owned by individuals, leaving everyone else out in the cold."

Howard turned to the socialists. "You want to confiscate privately created values for the community. And you" (glancing at the others) "want to give publicly created values, such as land rent, to individuals. I can't see it." But his voice was quickly drowned out.

When the boat landed, everyone

hurried to claim as much land as possible. Howard protested, "But none of you created this land—how can you claim it as your own? The land should belong to everyone, not just to those of us who were lucky enough to get here first."

As more immigrants came, a social system evolved which immensely favored the original settlers and their descendants. Any ant who hadn't grabbed land while it was still free for the taking had to pay rent to those who had; and the more immigrants, the higher the rents. The descendants of the original settlers no longer had to work for a living, but the new settlers found it increasingly hard to get ahead. Poverty developed on a wide scale just as in the old country.

Many bills were passed to take care of the less fortunate ants, but were financed by taxes on sales and income which made it even harder for those on the bottom to make a living. Their crime rate rose and their educational level dropped — and more programs were instituted.

The class structure solidified, and over the centuries the intelligence of the ants diminished; for the lower classes, which eventually made up most of the population, had been caught in a trap from which it became increasingly harder to escape. Placid acceptance became the public ideal. And even now, one would have a hard time finding a dissatisfied ant.

Referring to an article by Perry Prentice in the November Architectural Forum, an editorial in *The Christian Century* (Dec. 1965) states "Prentice's reasoning makes sense. Why should we urge the owners of real estate to improve their property and then penalize them for doing so with an improvement tax? And why should we not tax unused land according to the value which community investments bestow on it? Here, at least, we have a dimension of the problems of urban renewal and suburban development which should be placed beside those solutions which are moral, social and governmental."