

REFLECTIONS OF AN INDIVIDUALIST

There is a great temptation to young men, who do not have sufficient capital to start business or a practice, to feel that it is capital that determines our being able to live and work as we desire. When I was a young man working in Glasgow, I went one day to John Paul, the then Editor of *LAND & LIBERTY*, with my doubts about this. He impressed on me the fact that capital is pressing for employment, just as labour is doing. He illustrated the point by referring to an incident John Cassells had experienced the day before. At that time Cassells and his brothers were engaged in making samples of tweeds into book form for the use of tailors and merchants. A traveller for a machine that would halve the labour of making the sample books had called to sell it. The Cassells said they would like to have it but had not the money. The traveller agreed to let them have the machine at once and to defer payment for twelve months. By that time the savings in labour costs would cover the price of the machine. That illustration cleared my doubts. What mattered was the existence of an effective demand by those engaged in all other spheres of work for clothes, or the cloth.

When I was first taught geometry (the text book being Euclid) and was asked to accept certain axioms regarding points, lines, etc., I did so without any reservation. If these were not facts or basic truths, the propositions that followed could not have been proved true and so physics, engineering science, etc., would not have got very far, as man would have had to depend on trial and error. So it was with the axioms of Henry George's teaching.

I had grown up in the belief that all men had an equal right to life and to liberty. Therefore I had no difficulty in accepting George's axioms that all men have a "natural right" to the use of the land upon which they are born, equally with all their fellows, and a right to live their lives in their own way so long as in doing so they did not infringe their fellow's equal right. I accepted the proposition that what a man made was his rightful property, against the claims of all others either as individuals, as a mob, or as a Government, and that he should be left alone to exchange what he had made for the things that others had made.

To-day, we have men believing that Sir Richard Acland is worthy to be a leader in politics and one of those who should have the making of our laws. Yet in a recent broadcast, he said "Ownership of a thing was in the using of it"—"The user is the owner." He asserted that prehistoric man made a stone hammer so that he might use it, and so he was the owner. Then he argued that in a primitive state of society a blacksmith could "own" the smithy and tools, as he was the user. But to-day, when the smith's work is done in a large engineering factory the workers cannot own the machines they use: therefore the factory must be nationalised. What a misunderstanding of the nature of things! Even prehistoric man would know that the hammer was his own rightful private property because he had made it.

The alternative to my having equal access to the raw material of this world (the land) and through it to the use of the light and heat of the sun and of the other forces of nature, to an absolute right of property in the things that I make and freedom to exchange these as I wish, is that I have not liberty. Injustice is done when others direct my life and determine what is to become of the product of my labour. In effect I am the serf

of another man or of some collection of men. The democratic election of my governors by the mob does not alter my status—I am still a serf, however well treated. Once a man has come to doubt or deny the existence of "natural right," there is no reason why he should recognise any injustice in a state of slavery.

People to-day are not taught that their welfare depends on their own efforts. They are encouraged to look for a share of what others as well as what they have produced, to be distributed by a beneficent state. This requires laws so restrictive of men's liberty that they are chains, no matter with what good intention they are forged. I am glad that I was born with an innate, sturdy spirit of independence and a love of liberty. I was taught the supreme value of the individual and shown the example of those through the ages who stood bravely for freedom against those who would have oppressed them, or "cribbed, cabined and confined" their life, whether king, nobles, freebooters, or the mob.

Let this be clear, man does not live by capital; it is only a tool. All that man has, his food, shelter, clothing, and all the things that man makes for his sustenance and comfort come from the land of this globe; there is no other source.

What then is the remedy? It is not to nationalise the land, for that would empower the State to direct the application of men's labour and to exact whatever rent the Government chose. It would result in conditions worse than in private ownership, for there would be no alternative but to accept the terms of the monopolistic landowner—the State.

Nor is the remedy to divide the land among the users of it, such as is being foolishly done in some countries. Land is being parcelled out among the peasants as a cure for the world-wide land hunger which is the chief cause of the new slavery—Communism—but this only creates a new set of landlords, while the labourer and the rest of the community are still left landless.

What then is the right and just method of securing to all the people equal benefit from the land of their country, the estate to which they have, by the fact of their birth, become heirs? It is to do precisely what a man would do when leaving his property to his heirs. He would not have it cut into so many pieces, but would see that each enjoys his due share in the *value* of the thing. Therefore the simple plan is to deal with value or rent of land in the same way, making that the common property of the people and using it for the common good. This requires a valuation of all land holdings and contribution to the public treasury by each landholder according to the value of the land he holds—in other words, the application of land value taxation. By this, all who had the use of a part of our estate (the land) would pay its full value to all the others who, by reason of the users having possession of that part, were being kept off it. Then all that men made by their work would be left to them as their private property; for, concurrently with the collection of the taxes on land value would be a reduction, and final abolition, of all rates and taxes on buildings, improvements and on other things produced by labour.

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