

# A Conspiracy of Silence Smothers the Answer to Communism

THE oft-repeated charge that the taxation of land values is blanketed by a conspiracy of silence may sound to the outsider the extravagant exaggeration of a disgruntled minority ready to blame others for their own shortcomings as propagandists. To them we earnestly commend a new Schalkenbach Foundation 100 page book entitled, "The Effective Answer to Communism—and Why You Don't Get it in College". Joint authors are Dr. Harry Gunnison Brown, emeritus professor of economics, University of Missouri, and his wife, Elizabeth Read Brown.

Chief of the many questions posed and convincingly answered is whether an unpublicised professional fear is the Achilles heel of capitalism's answer to Communism. No unbiased person could read this quietly authoritative work without being gravely concerned, and without accepting as proved that the truth about taxation is deliberately suppressed. Nor could he fail to be impressed by the theoretical case, supported by carefully analysed evidence, presented in favour of the taxation of land values.

This book is a "must" alike for the tyro, the sceptic and the enthusiast: certainly every reader of *Land & Liberty* should have at least one copy. There are chapters dealing with the problem of idle sites in American cities, tax policy and zoning in modern cities, the cost of housing, and Australian experience of the benefits which implementation of the land value policy has conferred. The prospector and economic rent, the rights of property, and the void in college economics each receive attention. There is a chapter on history as it might have been, and another on academic freedom and the defence of capitalism.

Provocatively Dr. Brown subtitles one of the chapters on Keynes' ideas—they occupy a fifth of the present book—"How Keynesism Gives Aid and Comfort to the Communists".

Other chapters include a brief review of the definitive work on the Single Tax Colony at Fairhope, Alabama, "Foundations, Professors and 'Economic Education'", and that delightful satirical poem by Edmund Vance Cooke about the uncivilised monkeys whose understanding of the rights of property, the law of wages and a healthy social economy puts to shame the general run of economists and politicians.

This sampling from his latest work gives a hint of Dr. Brown's views:

Time was when the American Declaration of Independence and the struggle of the American states for freedom from political domination by Great Britain, stirred the imaginations of liberty loving people in many other countries. Today we seek allies and sympathisers in our ideological struggle against the socialistically regimented countries of the communist bloc. Will it help us in this

ideological struggle, will it stir enthusiasm for capitalism, if in the "capitalism" that we practice and that we urge upon others, there must be included vast private income derived from charging for permission to work on and to live on the earth? — Page 7.

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Scarcely ever, in the economics courses at American universities and colleges—even in the course in Public Finance—is the theory of the subject—or any such relevant data—presented to students adequately, so that any considerable number of them get any appreciable understanding of what land value taxation can accomplish or why it can accomplish it. Frequently neither the teacher nor the textbook mentions the subject at all,—or they mention it only to make a few brief and unanalytical derogatory comments on it. — Page 16.

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Teachers of economics continue to stress "the ability theory" of taxation and, in lesser degree, what they are pleased to call "the benefit theory" and appear to have, usually, no appreciation of the overwhelming advantages to a community or a nation, of making the annual rental value of land the first source and, in so far as possible, the chief source of taxation. The truth is, despite the sniping of an antagonistic economics professoriate, that, certainly within the limits of what a tax taking substantially all of the annual rental value of land would yield, such a tax would be more advantageous even to propertyless wage earners of small income, than the most drastically progressive tax on earned incomes or on all incomes together, and this even though such drastically progressive income tax were to take nothing at all from such wage earners. Then why should any economics professors plume themselves on their "liberalism" when they are putting chief emphasis on the "ability theory"? And how can they think of themselves as sympathetic toward the ordinary worker, when they persistently refuse to present fully and fairly to students who would eagerly listen, the demonstrable advantages of and the convincing arguments for such land value taxation? Or are ambition, hard work, efficiency, and the willingness to save and invest, so deserving of punishment that we should tax them in preference to taxing land values, although the latter tax policy is better even for average and below-average propertyless wage earners!

Is it, perchance, regarded as academically more "safe," or less "radical," for economics professors to emphasise a tax system that goes a considerable distance towards the Marxian ideal—"from each according to his capacity, to each according to his need"—than to emphasise land value taxation, which is of the very essence of a truly self-consistent philosophy of free private enterprise?—Page 18.

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The difference between receiving income from capital which, without work and saving, would not even be in existence, and receiving income because one is in a strategic position to forbid others the use of a part of the earth which has been made desirable because of geological forces or community growth and development—this difference is fundamental and profound. What shall we say of learned professors of economics in whose economic philosophy—and in whose teaching and textbooks—it has no place at all? — Page 19.

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If there is occasionally a teacher who is eager to present fully and fairly the case for land-value tax policy, he is quite likely to be limited in his opportunities to do so by the prejudices of colleagues. Texts are selected and assignments arranged which all must use and follow. Dull and, from the point of view of the general welfare, relatively inconsequential topics are dwelt on for weeks. Almost no time—if any at all—remains for a consideration of the question whether some men should have to pay other men for permission to work on and to live on the earth in those locations where work is relatively productive and life reasonably tolerable. The situation is much as it would be in a medical college if the lecturers on cancer and rabies were forced to devote their time chiefly to the subject of poultices and dressings and were allowed hardly any time for the explanation of surgical techniques, radium and x-ray treatment, and vaccination!

In one case that came to my attention, the hindering prejudice was not that of the teacher's colleagues—for he was the one economics teacher in a very small college—but of his own former teachers. He feared to use a particular textbook that clearly stressed the advantages of land-value taxation, because he felt that, if he did use it, his former teachers at the university where he had earned his Ph.D. degree might learn about his doing so and might be unwilling then to recommend him for some better position elsewhere! — Pages 30 - 31.

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It is my experience that students in the "principles" of economics—and in public finance, too—are more interested in the land-value-tax part of the course than in any other part. Individual students have informed me that they have heard about this topic as a part of the course and that they wanted to take the course especially for that reason. Any adequate presentation of this topic reaches for fundamentals. It stirs discussion. It is dramatic. The students talk about it outside the class. Toward the end of my teaching at the University of Missouri, one of my best students said to me that "the question of the land tax is the most discussed question on this campus". Students endeavour to explain the theory of it to others not taking the course. They talk about it at home during vacation. Teachers who omit or "soft-pedal" this part of economics can scarcely hope, if other things are at all equal, to make their classes as interesting to their student customers.

— Page 32.

Yet those who most loudly proclaim their opposition to communism, both conservatives and "liberals," persistently oppose it [the taxation of land values], despite mounting evidence of its beneficial effects. Or, at best, they studiously ignore it. Do they definitely prefer continuing heavy taxes on capital and its income rather than have any increase in the taxation of land values? Or do they hope to relieve capital by increasing the burdens of the comparatively poor? — Page 91.

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A well-known economics teacher who had collaborated in the writing of a book in which increased taxation of land values was favoured, told me in private conversation that he had, because of this, taken considerable "razzing" from colleagues. Another economics teacher confided to me that when, during his graduate school days, he had made his interest in land-value taxation known to one of his teachers, the latter suggested to him that, as a young economist, he should be careful about committing himself thus to a view not generally held in the profession. A third economist, after some experience in teaching economics and in collaborative writing, remarked to me that "economists seem to have closed minds on the subject". And a fourth economics teacher told of making reference, in a graduate course at one of our most distinguished universities, to Henry George as an economist, whereupon his professor replied: "Well, if we call Henry George an economist."

Toward the end of my teaching at the University of Missouri, a student coming there from a small college and enrolling in my course in "Public Revenues," remarked to me that a former economics teacher had asked him: "What do you want to take that for?" The teacher referred to the land-value tax idea as "mediaeval" and said, in regard to my course: "Well, don't pay too much attention to it."

During my years of teaching at the University of Missouri, we had many students who had done their first two years of college work elsewhere. Almost without exception they had been taught nothing, or next to nothing, about this really fundamental reform for the strengthening of the free private enterprise system. Will there continue to be practically no chance to learn anything about it in some ninety-nine per cent of our colleges, where, of all places, its study would seem to be most appropriate and desirable? — Page 96.

### **The Effective Answer To Communism**

**and Why You Don't Get it in College**

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