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Common and Individual Rights in Land

MEN'S RIGHTS TO THE LAND have been asserted by a long series of social philosophers. They ranged, to recall only a few, from the Fathers of the Church, to Paine and Jefferson in the eighteenth century, to Mill, Spencer and George in the nineteenth and to Dewey, Russell and Monnier in the twentieth.

But in most of the assertions there lurked a contradiction. Either the common right, which is the equal right of all men by virtue of their humanity, abridged the individual right, which is the right of each human person by virtue of his personality, or the individual right contradicted the common right.

This contradiction persisted until it was resolved by social philosophers in the last decade or two. The contradiction was illustrated in the encyclical *Rerum novarum* of Pope Leo XIII. Its resolution was summarized in the world address of Pope Pius XII of Sept. 1, 1944.¹

What is of moment is that the philosophical solution is now receiving world-wide distribution through the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade,² of which J. Rupert Mason is president and the veteran land reformer, Arthur W. Madsen, secretary. It was adopted by the Seventh International Conference to Promote Land Value Taxation and Free Trade, a gathering at Swanwick, Derbyshire, England, on Aug. 14 to 21, 1949, attended by land reformers from many countries.

The definition of human rights in the land is presented in a "Resolution on Individual and Common Rights in Land" circulated along with a "Declaration of Principle and Policy". The declaration has more limited appeal, as it seems to be a leaf out of the book of the Liberal Liberty League of England. But the resolution on rights in land is worthy of universal acceptance. The International Union has published it in English, French, Spanish, Italian, German, Portuguese, Danish and Esperanto versions and already it is winning wide notice in scattered parts of the earth. Mr. Madsen and his collaborators deserve the gratitude and aid of all who appreciate the basic importance of the land question in our time, and the contribution that clear thinking can make to its solution.

W. L.

¹ Space does not permit me to go into the details of the controversy, which were given in my paper, "Natural Law and Human Rights in Agriculture," presented Nov. 13, 1944 before the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. It will be covered, at any rate, in my larger paper, "Human Rights in Natural Resources," to be published in the next volume of this *Journal*.

² 4 Great Smith Street, Westminster, London, S.W. 1, England.