## A NOTE ON LOCKOUTS

By Alexander Mackendrick

It may not be unprofitable to ask ourselves at this fateful moment, what is the real significance for Sociological science, of those industrial disturbances known as Lockouts. For the degree in which we realize that the happenings of the passing day are but indications or symptoms of the working of some hidden force, marks our progress in the understanding of life; and the root of all error lies in man's failure to do this, and in his assumption that the symptom has nothing behind it. According to the short arithmetic by which most men make their calculations, employers are greedy for profits and workers for wages: Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug-of-war—and there you are! That's all there's in it. But is it all? It should surely be obvious even to the hasty thinker in his more leisurely moments, that some deeper diagnosis of the social disease is required than that which simply assumes the rapacity of Capital and the stubbornness of Labour. For a lockout is never in the interests of Capital; and none are more acutely aware of this than the intelligent employer. Not only is his invested money rendered unproductive for the period of suspension, but his machinery and raw material are attacked by the gnawing tooth of time, and a leakage of his accumulated resources takes place in all directions. When, therefore, the employer says to his workers: "You must take lower wages or I must shut shop," what is the combination of circumstances that can have compelled him to face so unprofitable an ultimatum? Obviously, that the cost of raw material, overhead charges, taxes, and the wages demanded, constitute a total production-cost which makes it impossible to sell his product at the price buyers will pay. To go on producing means bankruptcy and ultimate disaster for himself and his workers, and the only alternative is to call a halt. His taxes and rates are based upon the value of the site he has paid or is paying for—plus the use he makes of it and the value of the buildings and machinery he employs—a burden upon him which, by the way, may be contrasted with the fact that some other proprietor who is keeping unused an equally valuable site, escapes tax payments altogether. The same set of circumstances tends to increase costs of living (including house-rents) for the workers, and to necessitate the continuance of high wages. The locked-out workers who might conceivably employ themselves in market-gardening, poultry-farming, forestry, or salmon-fishing and incidentally increase the supply of those commodities to the market, find a game-keeper or land-agent blocking the way; and at every other point where an alternative might have been found to the dilemma of accepting the employers' terms or starving, an angel with a flaming sword guards the pass in the interests of special privilege.

The fact is that employer and worker alike are being subjected to a pressure or influence which neither of them quite understands. Does it not look as though both Capital and Labour had been "locked out" from some pre-requisite to their joint enterprise, and are being pushed against each other in a futile and unnatural conflict? And is not the philosophic radical justified in suspecting that lockouts such as we are threatened with at present, are merely local manifestations of a universal lockout from the normal use of the earth's resources; a lockout the pressure from which is constant, sometimes relaxing slightly, when in consequence industry revives, and again intensifying, when bad times set in? But, good heavens! the sceptical reader may exclaim, to what extraordinary conclusions are we being driven? Is it possible that the cause of all unemployment and trade disputes, and indirectly of all the resulting bad blood and demoralization and deterioration of character is to be found in those few words, "locked out from land"? Quite possible, and extremely probable. By way of illustration, the following personal experience may be pertinent.

About ten years ago and before there were any "war conditions," the writer learned from the Glasgow Herald that the prosperous town of Dunfermline was suffering an acute attack of house-famine, and called shortly thereafter on an old legal friend in that city from whom he had confirmation of the accuracy of the report. On being asked whether there were no master-builders in the district whose business in life it might be to provide houses when required, the man of law pointed to a field in which sheep were grazing. "Ten days ago," he said, "I offered the owner of that field on behalf of a builder-client thirty pounds per annum per acre as a feu-duty so that he might erect some workmen's dwellings, but the owner refused it—and there you are." The next question naturally was: "Upon what annual assessment is that owner paying rates and takes?" The reply was, "about 30s. per annum per acre." The final interrogation took the following form: "And if the owner were invited to pay rates and taxes on the price you have offered, which represents the present value of the land as determined by the people's need of it, would he probably come to terms with your builder-client?" "Yes," replied the lawyer, "he certainly would." Now does not this true tale present the industrial problem in a nutshell? A little use of the imagination may assure us that this was not the only builder who was prevented from building by a similar hold-up policy on the part of other owners. By a further effort one pictures not only the builders' offices with idle draftsmen and clerks, but an army of masons, carpenters, plasterers, gasfitters, slaters, etc., all eager to build houses and earn wages; shopkeepers equally eager to have those wages spent over their counters; commercial travellers anxious to book orders for the goods demanded; and, finally, the people wanting the houses and able to pay for them. Then (one knows it without being told) these tradesmen who might have been employed building the houses so urgently required, do not remain where no wages can be earned, but seek employment in Edinburgh, Glasgow or Dundee, competing for jobs with those already employed and dragging down wages so far as trade union regulations will allow. All this natural and spontaneous exchange of service which would have contributed to the good of all, was prevented by—what? By a lockout from the land. The newspapers did not call it by that name, but that assuredly is the only description appropriate to the condition of Dunfermline at that time. The master-builders were clearly not responsible for the unemployment of the tradesmen or the shortage of houses in this case. Neither are they to be blamed in any of the other instances where the hated word "lockout" is used with all its miserable associations of cold and darkness and hunger.

When will the world learn that it is (to adopt Mr. J. E. Grant's felicitous phrase) "the captivity of restricted opportunity," the subtle impersonal constraint of unrestricted landownership pressing capital and labour from both sides, that is the parent of lockouts? And when will it discover the truth that there is but one remedy, to lay the burden of public income where it ought to lie, upon the communally-created value attaching to the natural resources whether used or unused? We can only "hope against hope and ask till we receive."

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Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin. I believe that in a really Christian community, in a society that honored not with the lips but with the act, the doctrines of Jesus, no one would have occasion to worry about physical needs any more than do the lilies of the field. There is enough and to spare. The trouble is that, in this mad struggle, we trample in the mire what has been provided in sufficiency for us all; trample it in the mire while we tear and rend each other.—*Henry George in* The Crime of Poverty.