

# the Henry George News

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## Property — Primitive Style

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THE idea of private property is so widespread that we may well call it a natural law. Animals show that they feel they have exclusive rights in their hunting ranges, their dens, and in the food they obtain. So too, primitive man maintains his exclusive control over certain articles. He possesses property because he has made it, or because he has found it, or because he uses it. When he no longer has any use for property it ceases to be his and anyone else may preempt it.

An interesting illustration of this is furnished by the ownership of land among primitive Agila people in South Eastern Idoma of the Benue Plateau State of Nigeria. There when a man plants cassava or rice, and grows crops, the land is his. But if he allows the land to fallow for more than a few years his title lapses—anyone else may then take it. Primitives in Agila Town also claim property rights in tools, food, clothing, names, rituals, privileges and a host of other tangible and intangible objects.

When one man possesses a surplus of one form of wealth he may exchange it for a similar surplus of a different form of wealth possessed by his neighbor. This exchange, or barter, is of great benefit to both parties. In early times it probably took place only

when different forms of wealth were accessible to different individuals or communities. Thus a community living near the sea might exchange fish for yams, the products of activities of its inland neighbors. Or a community having access to timber, palm oil, and coconuts might exchange these products with less fortunate neighbors.

The exchange of wealth is not an easy problem however, unless the community practices division of labor. Where different individuals specialize in the production of different things, each is able to produce more than he needs and therefore exchanges the surplus. Through the greater effort that the specialist is able to bring to his particular task, the work is done more efficiently than it would be without division of labor, and the wealth of the community is increased.

When the wealth produced in this way is used in turn for the production of more wealth, the original producer may be considered a contributor to the final product, instead of the sole producer of an intermediate product. Thus the production of agricultural implements may be considered either by itself, and valued in terms of the market price of the implements, or it may be considered to be an element

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Street which had become a slum nine years later. Their next house on Clinton Avenue, Newark, was once the home of a millionaire, but that section was destroyed in the recent riots. The present location in an old residential area of East Orange is in good condition, and no student volunteers are ever called on anymore to paint walls or lay new floors. The Economics Education Institute, a Rusby family corporation, defrays the expenses and the school pays a rental of \$1 a year.

Among other guests who came and stayed for dinner were B. deWitt Bell, the son of Stephen Bell, who wrote *Rebel, Priest and Prophet*. This book about Father McGlynn has been republished by the Robert Schalkenbach

Foundation. Miss V. G. Peterson, Executive Secretary of the Foundation, a long and treasured friend of the Rusbys and the New Jersey school, was honored as the one to dedicate the new headquarters. This was done in a serious and delightful manner. Miss Peterson is in touch with world Georgism and spoke of the universality of this philosophy and the relatedness between groups in various countries.

Marie (Mrs. Elwood) Sheppard provided an interlude of good natured satire with song and museum costumes—the subject, women. Impromptu singing after dinner was coaxed from Lancaster M. Greene, Vice President of the HGS and George Collins, Philadelphia director.

## Poverty —

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in the production of grains, and valued at a percentage of the grain crop produced with the help of the implements. In either case the market is the governing factor. When several processes or labor may be valued at a given wage all may be considered to have a fractional interest in the resulting product.

In very simple types of society, exchange and inheritance of wealth are unimportant. The simplest forms of wealth are very easy to create. They consist of a few precious stone tools, clubs, animal skins and ornaments. When a man dies these may be buried with him. In any case they have no scarcity value. Anyone who wants similar goods can make them for himself. But in a complex society conditions are different—goods cannot be so easily replaced and the person who inherits an accumulation of certain articles has a very distinct advantage over his less fortunate neighbors.

Most tangible wealth involves great human services and labor and talent.

Subtler forms of intangible property often differ from human services mainly because they can now be bought and sold more or less independently of the persons who created them. Even land rent is but a claim on the productive behavior of the tenants, and, as the followers of Henry George have told us many times, we would still have the land if all land rents were to disappear. Wealth, on the other hand, tends naturally to disintegrate, and must constantly be reproduced by man if he is to survive.

As people progress from primitive modes of life, the natural instincts as to property require a refinement of understanding that was not previously essential. There was a rough-hewn justice in the notion that a primitive "owned" land while he was using it to grow yams, but the vague criterion of "use" is no longer adequate in an advanced society. More and more does it become evident that we must differentiate between what is and what is not truly property on the basis of its origin, or lack of origin, in human toil.