

# "The Land Belongs to All People"

by W. E. PEREIRA

NOT long ago it was widely reported that the Chief of the Seminoles, in the Everglades of Florida, told our government that the tribe would take payment (long overdue) for lands lost in the past, but he thought the government was rather foolish. The Chief pointed out that the unwritten Indian lore passed down the truth that land belonged to "all people," not just a few, and that land was created by the Almighty One for all to use. This fits in with our own biblical tradition as well. What lands the Indians do retain in ownership, however, they usually treat as tribal, not individual property.

In the Palm Springs, California land boom for example the recent turnover of title to Indians, including the right to long-term lease, has brought great prosperity to the people involved. Economic rent to land, made up generally of basic ground rent plus a percentage of the gross from enterprises carried on, make a steady source of income which is tax-free unless invested in other business.

In 1875 President Grant tried to give this land to the Indians, but they did not gain title and control until 1959. Only 115 of the descendants remain. More than half are under age and on the way to becoming millionaires. Typical bank balances read: Lisa Ann Sanchez (8) \$200,000; Damon Patrick Pietro (8) \$105,000; Marguerite Pierce (9) \$96,000; Marlene Elaine Rice (11) \$286,000.

A fourth of the 40-square-mile area of Palm Springs is the inheritance of these Agua Caliente Indians. One of the largest non-Indian owners, in possession of 4500 acres, is Raymond Ryan of Evansville, Indiana.

During the gold rush which drew Henry George's attention, prospectors

roamed the arid wasteland of desert surrounded by craggy mountains, in search of gold—not realizing that there was something more precious underfoot, which today might be labelled "gold." At the Thunderbird Country Club the golf balls fly over land valued at \$60,000 an acre that could have been bought 15 years ago for \$300 an acre.

Moving eastward we find similar, but more extensive, prosperity because of recent government rulings as to title to Indian lands, and the right, therefore, to lease to enterprisers who are anxious to do business with the owners. During the past few years the Colorado River section has blossomed into economic activity. This is benefiting some 1,500 Indians of the Colorado River Reservation—they are now landlords, and are using the economic rent of land to increase their group prosperity in many ways. Millions of dollars are going into cultivation of prime crops. Irrigation (because of a recent favorable water ruling) increases as ditches are increased. Resorts, residential communities, road-building, shopping centers, cultural centers, industrial parks, commercial enterprises and home-building on leased land proceed at a fantastic clip throughout the reservation.

In one area approximately 50 by 12 miles in extent the impact of the change begun some three years ago has brought only partial development so far. Future prospects however loom large.

There is no shortage of enterprisers eager to use labor and capital in this booming area. While economic law dictates rent to land, it also dictates wages to labor and interest to capital. What is going on in the reservation is a modern-day demonstration of the power imparted to land ownership. Also since

all we have to do is change "tribe" to "community" and let our imaginations roam, we can see the great advantages inherent in land value taxation up to all economic rent, for revenue to operate community facilities and cultural activities. Of particular importance is the fact that enterprisers — users of labor and capital—care not to *whom* economic rent is paid; they *know it must be paid to the land because of the immutable workings of the laws of economics*. This fact makes a big lie of the statements that when land is not privately owned there can be no free enterprise and that community ownership of land is "invading free enterprise." In fact when economic rent to land is

used to operate community facilities, it ought to follow logically that enterprise will be freer than ever before. Labor and capital ought to be "untaxed" and be free to move ahead with fewer restrictions on wages and interest earned as their share of the economic pie. Modern economists know that land is different from other property because of the inflexible nature of its supply. The full economic rent to land could be taken as tax by a community *without causing a change in the supply*. Tax cigarettes and the price goes up; tax land and the price goes down.

The Indians are teaching us some forceful lessons. Are we going to learn?

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sults in high prices for land. High prices for land mean more money. Our state bank is not allowed to lend money for investment in land, but other banks do. This is the real inflation.

I understand that in the United States inflation is not severe, but still there is unemployment. We as Georgists can explain this. Things will go in a wrong direction as long as the rent of land does not belong to the community. Either labor or savings have to bear the load. That means that some

people are out of work and others do not get back the value of the money they put in the banks.

Recently I read of bishops in France who called unemployment a scandal, and criticized the government policy of representing low unemployment figures as the remedy for inflation. With the same naivete governments regard a little inflation as a remedy for unemployment. To sound a note of warning—economic conditions in France look like those we see building up in America.

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#### CLARENCE E. TODD

West Coast Georgists are saddened by the loss of Clarence E. Todd, a lawyer and "old time stalwart," at the age of 86. He and his wife Madge joined in campaigns for Home Rule in California in 1913-15-17. He was a distinguished member of the Commonwealth Club in San Francisco and was a member of the first board of directors of the Northern Extension of the HGS and drafted its bylaws.

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#### CLAYTON J. EWING

Clayton J. Ewing of Mobile, Alabama and Mayfield, Illinois was the author of many helpful booklets on economics, including four on biblical subjects, in which he revealed his keen understanding of bible history and "Christian Economics."

Survived by Mrs. Ewing and greatly missed by many friends, Mr. Ewing died at his Illinois home early in April.