

A Genuine Jubilee

For most people the word "Jubilee" connotes a politically stimulated celebration in which there is little basis for true rejoicing. But to the ancient Hebrews the word contained a genuine association with thoughts of rejoicing.

The Jubilee was an integral part of the Hebrew socio-economic system, or more specifically, of the Mosaic Law. This system was characterised by an equitable division of land which gave every family in the Commonwealth of Israel direct access to the earth. As the latter is the source of all material necessities for man's subsistence, this measure ensured the prevention of involuntary poverty. Chattel slavery was indeed permitted to the Hebrews to some extent, but the more subtle, insidious form of slavery, viz. monopoly of natural elements essential for life, was prohibited, for, as Shakespeare says, "You take my life when you do take the means whereby I live."

Thus a worker was not compelled to share his produce with a landlord or exploiter of labour. So it was possible to envisage the conditions described in Deuteronomy 15:4, viz., "There shall be no poor among you; for the Lord shall greatly bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it," but only if the people fulfilled God's laws (f. verse 5). Note the phrases, "the land which . . . God giveth" and "an inheritance to possess."

However, the Mosaic Law recognized that any system, however sound in theory, could be perverted through the frailty and weakness of human nature. To allow for this, the Jubilee was therefore instituted.

Hence every 50 years the original equitable division of the land was restored. Inequalities due to foolishness, improvidence, injustice or selfishness were rectified (f. Leviticus 25:10—"And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof; it shall be a jubilee to you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.")

A description of the Jubilee is given in the twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus. Actually there is no definite historical record of the observance of the Year of Jubilee. But in the Jewish Encyclopedia page 607, the tradition of its observance before the captivity is indicated. And in "Antiquities," page 378, Ewald has observed: "On a close inspection nothing is more certain than that the Jubilee, in spite of its at first seemingly strange aspect, was once for centuries a reality in the national life of Israel." And Driver, in "Literature of the Old Testament," 7th ed. page 57, has remarked: "At least as far as concerns the land (for the periodical redistribution of which there are analogies in other nations) it must date from ancient times in Israel." And finally, Ezekiel (Chapter, 7, verses 12 and 13) refers to the non-observance of the Jubilee as one of the signs of the impending doom of his nation for its misdoings.

It is worth noting that the Hebrew did not own land; it was only his to use, subject to the equal rights of others. In the Old Testament, the word possession, and not ownership, is used in connection with land tenure, on the basis that God, being Creator, has the sole claim to be called owner. Moreover, the interest

of future generations in land could not be sold. The situation might be expressed by saying that the land was leased by God to the various families, and at the end of fifty years all leases fell in simultaneously, and then a fresh grant of land made for the next fifty years to all the Hebrew families. Thus the growth of a wealthy landed class and of a landless pauper class was obviated. John (Biblical Archaeology) described the Jubilee as "a regulation which prevented the rich from coming into possession of large tracts of land, and then leasing them out in small parcels to the poor, a practice which anciently prevailed, and does to this day, in the East." And Heinrich Heine wrote: "Moses endeavoured to bring property into harmony with morality, with the true law of reason, and this he accompanied by the introduction of the Year of Jubilee." While, of course, inequalities could arise through varying degrees of industry, the equality of economic opportunity under the Hebrew law precluded both the idleness of unearned riches and the idleness of involuntary poverty.

Further, it may be noted that the Hebrews distinguished between land (made by God) and improvements (made by man), between the title to land and to usufruct. This may be discerned in verses 14-16, and 29-31, of the 25th chapter of Leviticus. At any rate Josephus, in Antiquities iii 12, 283, 284, states clearly that if an outgoing tenant spent more on the land than what he gained from it, he received compensation for his unexhausted improvements.

Indissolubly linked with the Jubilee was the idea of liberty. The Hebrews recognized that slavery and denial of equal rights in land are closely associated, the latter being an important cause of the former (f. Genesis 47:18-21, Nehemiah 5:5). So at the Jubilee liberty was proclaimed to the captives (f. Leviticus 25:39-43, 47-55). Thus Ezekiel called the Jubilee "the year of liberty" (Ezekiel 46:17) in keeping with the tenth verse of Leviticus 25 quoted above. And "the acceptable year of the Lord" to which Jesus referred in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:19, and note also the previous verse), was, to quote Josephus, "the Jubilee . . . which name denotes liberty." Thus at the Jubilee emancipation of man (f. Leviticus 25:48-52), and restoration of land go hand in hand (f. Leviticus 25:25-28).

Unfortunately, however, privileged classes were set up, despite the warnings of far-sighted statesmen (e.g. I Samuel 8:11-18), and land monopoly emerged even though the prophets, particularly Isaiah, Micah and Amos, uttered stern warnings. After the captivity in Babylon the Jubilee was never again observed. However, there are some interesting post-exile references to land restoration in the Old Testament, notably the fifth chapter of Nehemiah, where Nehemiah succeeded in attaining the abolition of land monopoly without compensation. Moreover, in the writings of the prophets are to be found passages expressing conviction in the coming reign of justice, where equal rights to land would be restored (e.g. Ezekiel 36:28) and where men shall enjoy the produce of their labour (e.g. Isaiah 62:8, 9, 65:21-23, Ezekiel 28:25-26).

One cannot help compare the Hebrew Jubilee with our present Jubilee, with its artificially stimulated enthusiasm, its housing shortage, its slums, its increasing burdens on wealth producers, its growing inflation, its privileged classes of land monopolists and tariff monopolists, its interclass factions . . .

A genuine Jubilee in Australia in 1951 would ensure the realization of two freedoms about which many professing lovers of freedom are strangely silent, viz., freedom of access to natural resources, or freedom to produce, and freedom to exchange one's products as one thinks fit. These freedoms entail collection of ground rent for community purposes by the community, and elimination of taxation on labour and its products. Thus the principles of the Jubilee of Old Testament times can be embodied in a form appropriate to our times.

[Note: For further information on the land question and related matters in the Bible, readers are advised to buy Frederick Verinder's "My Neighbour's Landmark," obtainable at the League Rooms for 1/-]

TARIFFS.

In all lands the interest of the great majority is in free trade, and unless and until this interest is satisfied there will be strife and wars without end. The Atlantic Charter implies as much, when it urges for all nations "access on equal terms to the trade and raw materials of the world" and calls for "the fullest collaboration of all nations in the economic field."—The Co-operative Builder.

I believe myself that protective tariffs wherever they have been introduced have done harm. I believe they have warped and restricted the growth of the industries of the nations which have adopted them. I believe that they have been unfairly injurious to the poorer classes. I believe that these tariffs tend to the corruption of public life and of public men; that they make every town and every part of the country send a member to the Legislature not to consider the generous and broad interests of the whole country, but to push the particular line of goods and of manufacture in the place from which he comes.—Winston Churchill, in "The People's Rights."

ILLINOIS.

The southern part of this State has produced millions of tons of coal and barrels of oil, yet the relief roll percentages at times have been the highest in the United States. At one stage 58 per cent of the people of Williamson County were on direct relief and another 25 per cent dependent on various social agencies. As usual, land speculation and inequitable land distribution were present.—Henry George News, August, 1950.

CALL TO ACTION.

"The standard that I have tried to raise tonight may be torn by prejudice and blackened by calumny; it may now move forward, and again be pushed back. But once loosed, it can never again be furled! to beat down and cover up the truth that I have tried to make clear to you, selfishness will call on ignorance. But it has in it the germinative force of truth, and the times are ripe for it. If the flint oppose it, the flint must split and crumble! Paul planteth, and Appollo watereth, but God giveth the increase. The ground is ploughed; the seed is set; the good tree will grow.

"So little now, only the eye of faith can see it. So little now; so tender and so weak. But sometime, the birds of heaven shall sing in its branches; sometime, the weary shall find rest beneath its shade!"—Henry George.

Site-Value Rating

Until 1877 every municipal council in Australia used the Nett Annual Value system of rating. Since that year the great majority of councils have changed over to the site-value system (officially called unimproved capital value).

Over the whole of Australia there are actually now 631 councils which use the site-value system compared with only 361 still using nett annual value. The councils using the site-value system actually embrace more than 90 per cent of the total municipalised area of Australia. Only one council in Australia has ever reverted to the old system after experiencing site-value rating.

In Victoria the following Melbourne suburbs are using the site-value rating system: Brunswick, Camberwell, Box Hill, Chelsea, Coburg, Caulfield, Kew, Moorabbin, Oakleigh, Preston, Mordialloc, Sandringham, Essendon. These are the suburbs which have shown the greatest development over many years. Site-value rating has made it easier for more citizens to become home-owners because the higher rates upon vacant land discourage continued holding by speculators.

Other Victorian councils using site-value rating are: City of Newtown and Chilwell, City of Hamilton, Town of Portland, Borough of Echuca, Shires of Frankston and Hastings, Dandenong, Rosedale, Yea.

Studies in these councils have shown that about three-quarters of the houses carry lower rates under site-value rating than they would under annual value rating. Although rates are increasing in all councils under whatever system they operate the increase on house-holders in site-value rating areas is only gradual whereas in those rating nett annual value it is sudden and drastic. (Heidelberg and Ringwood Rate-payers will have found this last year to their cost.)

Primary producers are benefited under site-value rating. A study of orchard and poultry farm properties in the Greensborough Ward showed that 74 per cent of the resident orchardists and 83 per cent of the poultry farmers would gain reduced rates under site-value rating.

Site-value rating is equitable in principle because it charges rates in proportion to the value of the service rendered by the municipality as measured by the land value. Nett annual value charges rates according to the value of the citizen's own efforts.

PARASITES.

It is obvious that the Protectionist, instead of creating a new industry, has simply taken one industry and set it as a parasite to live on another. A protected industry is not a producing industry. It is a consuming industry. If a factory is, as the Protectionist alleges, a triumph for the tariff—then it is not producing; it is consuming—Professor Sumner, in Protectionism.

(Editor's Note: The essential evil of Protectionism is that the tariff tax levied on imported goods results in increased prices. Purchasing power is diminished, i.e., tariff legislation compels people to take less commodities for a given amount of money. This results essentially in a reduction of wages.)