

Land in Relation to Unemployment

CHAS. H. SMITHSON in the May number of *The Friend*, London, Eng., organ of the Society of Friends, has an admirable article under this head. From it we quote the following extract from the Minutes of the War and the Social Order Committee at the yearly meeting of the Society of Friends, 1922:

Everything fashioned by the hand of man comes, in the first place, from land. The men engaged in the two primary industries of mining and agriculture supply materials for those employed in all other industries. Anything, therefore, which restricts the use of land restricts employment over the whole field of industry. And, since the starting point of all employment is the land, reason suggests that the study of the tenure and use of land should also be the starting point of any investigation into the problem of unemployment.

Nature lays on man the injunction to labor to satisfy his needs, and at the same time supplies the land from which man can produce all that is necessary for his physical requirements. But where land is all privately owned, the landless man finds himself unjustly deprived of the natural opportunity to obey Nature's law, and consequently he finds himself absolutely dependent upon someone else to "find him work." Those who possess the legal power to control the land can determine how much, or how little, employment shall be given to the landless men; and since, under private ownership of land, it frequently pays to get less produce with a minimum of labor than a larger produce, where the increase would be mainly absorbed in wages, it follows that the minimum of labor is employed. If land, with security of tenure, was available for all who could profitable use it for more intensive culture, a large amount of additional employment would be found; a new negotiating basis for wages would be established throughout the whole field of industry; a check would be given to the yearly migration from the country into the towns; unemployment in the towns would be lessened, and an expanding home market would be created for the product of the towns. Everything, except land, to which value attaches is produced by man; *land is the creation of God*. Part of the confusion of thought, on this subject, arises from the fact that in most forms of what is called "real property" there is a value that is produced by man, because it is traceable to the private expenditure of labor and capital upon the land. This value, which should be described as the value of "improvements," to distinguish it from "land value," should belong to the individual who has made the improvements, or to the individual to whom he has transferred his right by gift or sale. But, after making full allowance for all unexhausted improvements, there remains a value which attaches to something which is God's gift to all His children, and it is this value which should be made common property.

There is only one just method of putting men on an equality in reference to the bounty of nature. The free gift of the Creator must be regarded as the common property of all, and each holder should pay to the community a ground rent equivalent to the advantage he enjoys. This ground rent should be paid, whether the land is used or not. This would insure the most effective use of the land, without hampering interference of governmental control, because it would not be profitable to hold land idle, which was subject to a ground rent. It would operate much like the "dead

rent" clause in a mining lease. Even a partial application of the principle, through the absorption of a part of the communal ground rent by the rating and taxation of land values, would have a powerful economic effect in bringing unused, or partially used, land into full use. Countless additional opportunities for the employment of labor would be opened up and the problem of unemployment would no longer present insuperable difficulties.