

Did God Give the Land to the People

IF SO, WHY DON'T THEY HAVE IT?

(Following are extracts from the first of a series of articles under the above heading from *Reynold's Illustrated News* (formerly *Reynold's Weekly*), an English paper of wide circulation, from the pen of Right Hon. Philip Snowden, M.P. ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Labor Government, and today one of the foremost leaders of the British Labor party.

The outspoken declarations of Mr. Snowden are in refreshing contrast to the timid evasiveness of Arthur Henderson, whose reply to the challenge of J. O'Donnell Derrick and the latter's comments appear on another page.—
Editor LAND AND FREEDOM).

A man is entitled to what he himself creates by his own industry, but there is no possible defence of a system which permits a few monopolists to take what other people have created.

So long as landowners are allowed by law to reap the fruits of public industry, public enterprise, and public expenditure, the mass of the people will remain poor and social progress will be impeded.

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Land differs in one important respect from all other forms of property. It is a natural monopoly. We may increase its productivity; we may add to its social and economic value; but we cannot increase its area.

Men must have access to land or perish. When a few people have a monopoly of what everybody must use, these monopolists are able to exact the uttermost farthing the landless persons can pay for its use.

Rent is the price which monopoly extorts for the use of land.

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Three things in the main, give economic value to land. First, the extent of the people's need of land; second, the density of the population; and third, the productive capacity of the people, that is the wealth of the community.

The more dense the population is the greater is land value. But we may have a dense population whose productive power is not very high; and on the other hand, we may have a very wealthy business community needing land, not for residential, but for commercial purposes.

The landowner in each case gets the utmost economic rent. But as the business community is richer than the poor residents of a slum area, he can extort a far higher ground rent from the former than the latter.

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Other factors come in to increase the value of land. Every scientific discovery applied to production increases wealth, and therefore enables the landowner to get a higher rent.

The making of roads at the public expense; improved methods of transport which render land more accessible to the population; improved marketing facilities; these and a hundred other industrial and social activities give an added value to land. *Every child born adds to the wealth of the landowners.*

Instances of how land values rise with the public demand

for land are so familiar to everybody that it is hardly necessary to quote examples.

(Here Mr. Snowden follows with examples of increased land values and instances how public improvements are held up by landlord exactions. He then proceeds as follows:

And with the rapid development of motor transport land values are going up everywhere. The landowners are fattening in their sleep.

To make the land available for use, the local authorities are spending money on roads, schools, parks, housing, and all the amenities and necessities of a new residential district. A public debt is being created, rates are being imposed, and the landowners get off with all the social value given to their land by this expenditure.

It is a monstrous wrong to the community. I have no patience with the complaints about heavy rates, so long as the people calmly submit to this legalized robbery.

Instead of basing local rating on land values, we tax the fruits of industry. If the owner of a cottage wants the decency of an extra bedroom or a bathroom, the rate assessor comes along, and makes him pay an extra rate for it. If a factory expands, and provides more employment, its rates are put up and its production costs increased.

The taxation and rating of land values would secure public values for public purposes. It would relieve industry and agriculture, and liberate municipal enterprise. It would cheapen land and cheapen building, and encourage thrift and business enterprise.

The rating of land values would be the key to open the door to freedom for our municipalities to go ahead with schemes for promoting the health and well-being of the people, and for relieving local industries of the burden of heavy rates.

Nicknamed Industrial Freedom

“**T**HEN came the modern age, beginning, let us say, about a hundred and fifty years ago. The distinguished marks of it have been machinery and the modern city. The age of invention swept the people off the land. It herded them into factories, creating out of each man a poor miserable atom divorced from hereditary ties, with no rights, no duties, and no place in the world except what his wages contract may confer on him. Every man for himself, and sink or swim, became the order of the day. It was nicknamed industrial freedom. The world's production increased enormously. It is doubtful if the poor profited much. They obtained the modern city—full of light and noise and excitement, lively with crime and gay with politics—and the free school where they learned to read and write, by which means they might hold a mirror to their poverty and take a good look at it. They lost the quiet of the country-side, the murmur of the brook and the inspiration of the open sky. These are unconscious things, but the peasant who has been reared among them, for all his unconsciousness, pines and dies without them. It is doubtful if the poor have gained. The chaw-bacon rustic who trimmed a hedge in the reign of George I., compared well with the pale slum-rat of the reign of George V.”

—STEPHEN LEACOCK.