

PRIMITIVE GEORGIST LEGAL BASES

by

Rev. MERWYN J. STEWART. F.R.G.S.

RESUME

However perfect may be our demonstration of the accuracy of Georgist theory one must always reckon with the man of caution, who distrusts his own power to detect a fallacy and wants to know how the principle works; and that not on a small scale or in local affairs, where admittedly we can prove our case to the uttermost.

The most convincing proof of the value of our philosophy is in Malaya and Nigeria, those parts of the British Empire where the teaching of Henry George has been most nearly applied avowedly to censure ancient public rights in the land, and to adapt native customary titles to the needs of a fully modern civilisation.

»The Crown Lands Ordinance«, No. 34 of 1884, Sec. 6, of the Straits Settlements, provided that all future grants of Crown Lands should be reassessed for site value every thirty years, ignoring improvements — this was the first great Georgist Statute in all the world. It has been adopted in all the adjacent »protected« Malay States, of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang (the Federated Malay States — 1909); Johore (1910), Kelantan (1896), Kedah (1916 — largely 15 year periods), Trengganu, Perlis, and Brunei (Borneo). In all these the payment of the whole site value to the

public treasury is accepted as the equivalent of the very ancient native tenures, which involved payments of money rent, of tithe of product, labour on public works, and personal military service in war and peace. Details are very well given in No. X Malayan Series, »Land Administration«, obtainable at 6d. from 88 Cannon Street, London, E. C. Due to this fundamental equity there is in Malaya constant general and universal prosperity in face of chaotic markets for rubber, tin and copra: absence of labour troubles and disputes: friendly co-operation between diverse races, Malays, Europeans, Chinese, Indians and many other

peoples; large and small holdings flourishing side by side: no unemployment, but a constantly rising wage rate in the face of limitless adjacent masses of underpaid labour who are not excluded in any way. There is no parallel in the world to Malay public finance.

These few millions of brown people own, free of debt, much more than 2,000 miles of railroads, among the best in the world in equipment and management. They have even lent over four million pounds for »feeder« lines to the less happy Kingdom of Siam; for the railways add their cost to the public revenues as they are extended. Even at the worst collapse of the rubber market there was a Treasury balance of £ 1 a head, and this with very light taxation and no »protection«. This taxation is only due to the fact that all the bad tenures of Europe are found in the »29 varieties« of land titles in Singapore and Malacca, issued in the century before 1884, and these again are aggravated by the English municipal taxation on the use made of land. There is no official objection to the Municipal Single Tax, which has been enacted

in Suva Suva, the Capital of Fiji; where it is reported the City Council of Singapore are making enquiries, and where the Legislature is even now working on a general land value tax law to conserve public land rights. These rights are as clear throughout all the Pacific as in Fiji, and there is no shock to Maori thought in commuting all payments and services for a varying economic rent and securing to every producer the whole result of his personal effort.

As population grows and knowledge increases smaller areas per family are the most profitable and beneficial use of land, and the Single Tax provides the economic instrument for simplifying this change in quantity and usage at the proper time. In Northern Nigeria similar Ordinances have been in force since 1910, with amazing results in the tranquillity, prosperity, and commerce of its many millions. Conservative Cabinet Ministers are proud to proclaim this Georgist area as »the brightest jewel in the British Crown«, though disfigured by Protection, bad railway finance, and English land titles in the important harbours

of Southern Nigeria. The Northern Nigerian culture is level, fairly high, and rising steadily from chattel slavery and wage serfdom. Such a great city as Kano, with a population of about 100,000 and great trade and manufactures has no ~~side~~ to compare in misery with any large town in Europe, or places such as Bombay or Singapore, or the old Nigerian colony of Lagos, with its English tenures. »Native Races and their Rulers«, by Temple, is about the best book published on this little known area. (Cape-town »Argus«, 1918, 2/6).

The latest outgrowth of the Nigerian Georgeist land laws is Land Ordinance No. 3 of 1923 of Tanganyika

Territory, mandated to Great Britain by the League of Nations; which avowedly to preserve the existing ancient rights of the native public to the land, and to assure them sustenance for themselves and their posterity provides for the site value of all available lands to be paid to the public Treasury, and reassessed at intervals disregarding improvements. The Land belongs to the Ruler, as Trustee for the public; the improvement and the product belong to the Producer, but the rent cannot be alienated. This is not only Maori, or Malay, or Bantu, or Nigerian law, but English law also. The Crown *owns* every bit of land and no »owner« can own any part but his improvements, and *hold* the land as tenant. Only in the British Empire and in Soviet Russia is there no private ownership of land, in law: and so it is, that the Crown lawyers have never advised rejection or delay of a Georgeist enactment from any of the Colonies. The tragedy is that the false education of the British administrative class sends them into the world with firm belief in the value and virtues of Land Monopoly and densely ignorant of how their kindly intentions may be carried out. But no more, surely, remains to be said. Too much is repeated to-day as to the weakness and deficiencies of savage races. When one adds to the acute misery of perhaps a fifth of any community where public rights to the

land are ignored the constant racking anxiety for the future of perhaps another three fifths, and the fear of violence and instability which haunts the »Thoroughly Comfortable«, we ~~may~~ take him at his worst, is not better off on the average than we.

When we reflect on the illimitable production of good things which o

metal slaves can provide for us, our facilities for international mutual help by exchange, on the inventive faculties of our young folk now as rule crushed by poverty and perverted by a lack of decent opportunity for self expression, we can indeed be grateful for the clear vision which Henry George transmits to every fair and intelligent reader of the natural conditions, where »Progress« and »Poverty« are once and for all separated by the very book which describes them, or perhaps from henceforth to be coupled as Progress and Justice, or Progress and Liberty. Let us take heart. The whole earth gives a verdict which cannot lightly be brushed aside: and the code of every primitive people (and the primitive code of every sophisticated people) is Georgeist in basis, while every attempt to legalise injustice must fail, or destroy those who will submit to it.

»Truth struck to earth shall rise
again, the
eternal years of God are hers:
But Error wounded writhes in
pain, and die
amid her worshippers.«

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