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OUR OBLIGATION

Last month, Joseph Scott, president of the Los Angeles Community Chest, and Donald O'Melveny, campaign chairman, issued a statement appealing for help from the public. "The situation in Los Angeles," the statement said, "is of the utmost gravity. Let us not deceive ourselves. The entire future lives of 100,000 or more children are at stake. . . . Children, whose health and nervous systems have been undermined by malnutrition, and whose mental outlook has been clouded by the gloom of homes where want and discouragement have broken the morale of parents, must look for needed aid, care and uplifting to the people of this community. If this assistance be not forthcoming, the lot of these children is one of distress and suffering in the present, and tragic as concerns the future."

Recently, Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins said that one out of every five children of needy parents is beginning to show the insidious effects of the long depression. In referring to this, the statement of Mr. Scott and Mr. O'Melveny says: "This estimate is fully carried out by our survey of conditions in Los Angeles. One of every five fighting for the rights of childhood! Does not the picture touch our hearts? The home lives of these children are imperiled; their health already weakened, is endangered further. They need food, clothing, shelter, and, besides these, the endearments of home life, the fun of playing as other children play."

"Fighting for the rights of childhood! What are those rights? Apparently Mr. Scott and Mr. O'Melveny do not know, for they do not even hint at the cause of this deplorable situation. What is the matter, does each generation have less right here on earth than preceding generations? Did God stop caring about little children after he had made one or two sets?"

Until these children are old enough to earn their own living they will be dependent upon their parents so we must see what is the matter with them, why they are not providing food and clothing and shelter for their families. God has provided a very interesting and useful planet for this very purpose. It is one of the lesser heavenly bodies, to be sure, in fact it's a bit dinky,

but quite sufficient unto our needs, Mr. Malthus to the contrary. God has provided the storehouse of raw materials and makes only one stipulation regarding the finished product—go to work and make it.

Haven't the parents of these children as much right as their prehistoric ancestors had to use this great storehouse? Certainly, if these children have a right to life, they have a right to the things that sustain life and a right to enough of the earth to produce these things. We mean that every man has a right to use a portion of the earth without paying another individual for the privilege.

In a radio address for the benefit of the Community Chest, Will Rogers said that what we give should not be called a donation, it is an obligation. We object to the idea that we are "obliged" to provide food for any able bodied man and his family. That is *his* obligation. My obligation is to do my bit to safeguard his rights, and my own, to the use of the earth. He may want to be a farmer and raise crops. All right, why should he become a tenant farmer, always giving a part of his crop to some other mortal for the privilege of tilling the soil? Why should he, if he wishes to buy a farm, pay speculative land prices of two or three hundred dollars an acre for the same land that was open to homesteaders one or two generations ago?

Perhaps he would rather keep a shop and trade articles of merchandise for part of the crop that some other man raises. He has a right to do that, too, without paying someone for the privilege of using a certain corner for the purpose. Only the community as a whole has a right to say whether he may use it or not, and only the community has a right to collect that payment if he does use it.

You can't use land without employing labor, either your own or someone else's. And most, though not all, labor is productive. Putting idle land to use and thus employing labor means making things—things that men want and need—homes, food, clothes, furniture, automobiles and so on forever, for man is never satisfied.

No man is, in any sense of the word, obliged

to feed another who is physically able to work. But suppose he is able and willing, yet cannot get work? If that is the case somebody is standing between him and this great natural storehouse, and our obligation lies in getting that somebody out of the way so the man can work. When the fathers of today are given the same access to land that their ancestors enjoyed, little children will not be held up as objects of pity begging for alms. The slogan of every community chest should be "Are you getting your share of the earth?"

In speaking of the great problem that confronts this country in the matter of feeding the hungry and unemployed, the *Literary Digest* says: "The task overshadows that accomplished by former President Hoover in Belgium, for the needy here number twice as many as the entire population of the little buffer State between France and Germany, and, of course, outnumber the homeless and fatherless which the World War, the massacre of the Armenians and the Greco-Turkish conflict left as an eternal memorial in the Near East."

Charity, cold charity! Charity, hot or cold, on such a wholesale scale as we are now practicing it, is a national disgrace. Let no man pride himself on what he does in the name of charity, thinking that he is mounting heavenward by exercising one of the three cardinal virtues. In order that we may sink as low as possible in our degradation, we hold up the little helpless children as particular objects of pity. In foreign lands, tourists are confronted with beggars who draw attention to their sores and deformities in their appeal for alms. Some teach their little children to run in ragged attire and with outstretched hands to beg of strangers.

The Los Angeles newspapers, and doubtless many others throughout this fertile land, are carrying pictures of little children, many of them cripples, in a campaign to work on public sympathy. Our children of the Community Chest are less professional than the foreign beggars; nevertheless, they hold out, or are represented by their elders as holding out, their little hands for alms! A little queer, isn't it when you come to think of it? You have two hands, and that's all I have. Why must I give you part of what I have made?

Release this idle land for homes. That is our obligation to our less fortunate children—less fortunate because luck was against them in this mad scramble to obtain a job from the lords of privilege, not less fortunate because they were born with less right to use the fruitful earth. Stop buying and selling and speculating in land and put the rental value in the public treasury where it belongs and you won't have any trouble with the tax question and you won't have helpless little children shaming us by holding out

their hands for alms. That is where our obligation lies, Mr. Rogers.

All up and down the whole creation, individuals and institutions are asking for help for these children and their parents in the name of charity. Is there not one among you who will demand in the name of justice that these families be allowed to exercise their natural rights to the use of the earth? Justice, not charity, is what the world needs.

THE SLUM PROBLEM

With so much attention directed to the problem of eliminating, or at least improving conditions in, the slums of great cities here and abroad, one might well ask, "What in the world does anybody want to live in the slums for." The answer, of course, being, "They don't." People live in sordid and unhealthful surroundings because they cannot pay rent in more desirable neighborhoods. We have an insane idea that high realty values mean prosperity, and do everything in our power to push them as high as possible and keep them there.

As we have said over and over in this little paper, private appropriation of this land rent means speculation and the holding of land out of use, resulting in low wages and unemployment. The landowners, unwilling to let go, exert themselves to the utmost to keep rentals up even when all other prices are sliding down rapidly. Whether real estate is "booming" or not, those unfortunates who find themselves in the lowest wage class must seek the cheapest dwelling places—and they are not the gardens of the earth. They are often very valuable property which the owners are holding for speculative purposes, and which they "improve," if by any stretch of the imagination slums can be called improvements, enough to pay the taxes and perhaps a little more. If the owners of this land had to pay all of the land rent into the public treasury, instead of into their own pockets, with no hope or expectation or possibility of pocketing the unearned increment which accrues with the growth of population, they would soon find it advisable to improve their land with the most up-to-date fire-proof buildings of whatever type was appropriate to the neighborhood. In other words, with the collection of land rent for public purposes, slums would automatically disappear.

"The Phelps-Stokes fund," says the Bulletin of the National Tax Association, "has announced a comprehensive study of slums and blighted areas, their causes, prevention, elimination, and conversion for proper housing or other uses. . . ."

"Professor Ford of the Department of Sociology at Harvard University will be the director of this investigation. George N. Thompson, until recently Assistant Chief of the Division

of Building and Housing of the United States Bureau of Standards in Washington, will be Associate Director."

We quote from two recent publications that show something of the problem here and in England:

Slums of the Nation's Capital

(From *Labor*, Washington)

Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose capacity for work seems equal to that of her husband, has made a personal inspection of the alleys and slums of Washington, and is helping draw plans to get rid of them through construction by the Public Works Administration.

Good news, indeed, though it was overdue long ago. Most Americans think of the national capital as a city of monuments and fine buildings. Few, too few, know of the ramshackle warrens where thousands of the city's workers are housed, and the "alley tenements" which are Washington's peculiar and special disgrace. These last are a direct inheritance from slavery days, when the human chattels lived on the alleys behind the master's house.

Twenty years ago, the first Mrs. Woodrow Wilson launched a war on Washington slums. She, too, had made a personal inspection, and she told a tale that shocked the country. But the real estate interests of Washington had power enough to preserve for 20 years this profiteering disgrace in the capital of the richest nation on earth. It is devoutly to be hoped that Mrs. Roosevelt will have better success.

Land Values, Rents and Slums

(From *Commonweal*, London)

Addressing the Architectural Association last Saturday, Mr. E. A. A. Rowse, whose subject was "The Solution for the City," remarked that "to most people it comes as a surprise that the worst conditions are to be found in apparently well-kept streets in North Kensington and Paddington. These areas are classed as slums, he said, because large numbers of well-behaved, kindly people have been forced to cram themselves into houses once inhabited by lesser city merchants on account of land values and rents making it impossible for any one family to occupy space adequate to its needs. The rise in land values and consequently rents, far more than building costs, has been a fruitful cause of slums."

Mr. Rowse appears to have left it there. No further mention of the subject of land is made in the report before us; instead, the speaker went on to advocate measures which, if adopted, could only result in further inflation of land values and rents, leading inevitably to more slums. He visualized 30-story dwellings arising amidst trees.

The more people there are packed together upon a given site, the higher both values and

rent will be. But if land values are taken for public purposes and all taxation abolished, land, the very first essential of any housing, will be available for every purpose and every family be able to occupy space adequate to its needs; population will spread itself out laterally and not, as now, pile itself up perpendicularly.

THE PILGRIMS

November stands out on our calendar because it brings our most distinctive national holiday, a feast day instituted by men and women who landed on a bleak wintry shore with nothing to greet them but the wilderness. Yet they enjoyed advantages beyond the most fortunate of our present generation, for they had access to as much land as they needed to produce the rude shelters and simple food that was possible under the circumstances. They did not have the co-operation of millions of their fellows equipped with modern machinery and the knowledge of scientific crop production. Yet, so well did they fare that immediately after their first harvest, they set aside a day of thanksgiving. That day has become a national institution, but the good earth, in town and country alike, has been taken away from the great masses of people, and this year millions of good Americans stand in the midst of bumper crops, look into their bare cupboards and empty coal buckets and wonder what in heaven's name they have to be thankful for.

The Pilgrim fathers had to borrow money from London adventurers to buy some simple tools and pay for their passage over here in the now famous *Mayflower*. There is money in the country today that could be used to build homes for this million and a half transient men, women and children that the Government hopes to place "in homes, boarding-houses, camps and other shelters, where they can be cared for like human beings." There is money to be had, there is plenty of labor available, what we want now is the land, home sites particularly, upon which these idle men can labor and build homes. The building of every house would speed up the production of every article that goes into the furnishing of a home. And the increased payrolls of many workmen would bring about this spending orgy that General Johnson is calling for. He ought to know that of all people on earth, Americans don't need any urging to spend. All they need is the money.

Will Rogers says: So Germany left the League. Well, we can't criticize. We never even went in.

There will be no degrading poverty and no excessive wealth when all are free to use the natural resources (land) on equal terms. The Taxation of Land Values will free humanity from the age-long iniquity of man-made poverty in a world overflowing with all the materials for happiness.—*The Porcupine*, Manchester, England.

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RED HERRING

Taxpayers' leagues, from coast to coast are agitating the public mind in an attempt to cut down the cost of government in order that taxes may be reduced. The burden of their cry is: "Fellow citizens, you are much too heavily taxed. We must do something about it." Whether the members and officials of these organizations understand the subject of taxation or not, it is impossible to tell, for the interests of the principal power behind them, that of the realtors, would induce them to hide the truth if they knew it.

For example, they say nothing whatever about the multitudinous taxes that are crushing industry. In none of their publications that have come our way, and we have seen a goodly number, have we found a single article enumerating the taxes that fall on any one item of merchandise from the raw material to the finished product. We have not seen any explanation of the manner in which taxes on goods are passed on to consumers, nor any suggestion that the farmer be relieved of the tax on his crops and farm buildings; that the homeowner be aided by removing the tax from his house and personal property; that the manufacturer be helped by un-taxing his machinery and equipment.

This would be real tax relief for all who are in any way producers, but the realtor is not a producer. He buys and sells what God created and he wants the tax taken off of it, or at least reduced to the near-vanishing point, so that he may hold his land, usually vacant, at no sacrifice to himself, until the need for land becomes so pressing that he can sell it at a huge profit. When land is held idle in this way, the community always loses, for it means that those who need land for homes or business sites must do without or pay a speculative price for it.

So the taxpayers' leagues are bent on having the taxes on land reduced, and for fear the general public might have an inkling of the truth about land and taxation, fears that are quite unfounded, we can assure them, they say much about taxes on small homes. If the expenses of government were pared down to the bone, so little reduction would be possible in the tax bill of the small home owner that he would be limp-

ing along just about as he is now. Suppose one or two hundred dollars could be cut from his tax bill, his annual income would still be so small that he couldn't have a very good time.

In *Taxes and Tax Dodgers*, Mr. Daniel W. Hoan, socialist mayor of Milwaukee since 1916, makes some very pertinent remarks concerning these organizations. "Thousands of workers who own their own homes are attracted by the cry against taxes and assist these selfish groups masquerading as leagues of *small* taxpayers. In local affairs it is nearly always the real estate swindler who runs the taxpayers' league. The men who first exploit the worker by selling him a home at a huge profit to themselves later to use him as a smoke screen for their own advantage. . . . People do not lose their homes because of tax payments but because they are out of employment and cannot pay their interest and mortgage installments. . . . I once challenged the officers of the Milwaukee Taxpayers' League to prove that a single home could be saved by reducing taxes. They were unable to do so."

Mr. Hoan closes with this sentence: "*Not lower taxes, but fairer taxes*, should be our watchword, in the fight for a better distribution of the good things of life, and a decent living for all." That is the crux of the whole matter. Reducing the tax bill sent out by the assessor to the small home owner, is of little importance. Removing taxes from industry and from improvements and personal property would mean a great step toward national recovery.

Taxes based on land values would not mean the confiscation of small homes, as the realtors would have you believe, but it would mean that much idle land would be brought into use, thus employing labor and increasing the payrolls and purchasing power of millions of our citizens. It would mean that homeowners could command better wages and salaries and could afford to pay taxes that were based on justice and scientific principles. Increased income, rather than decreased outgo, is what the vast majority of people need just now.

Sales taxes, processing taxes, taxes on buildings and equipment, all hamper business and industry. Taxes that make it easier for landowners to hold land idle tend to force up the selling price of land, as well as the rents that must be paid for stores and dwelling houses, thus concentrating wealth in the hands of a privileged class, wealth that would naturally form the purchasing power of millions of people.

In short, the interests of the realtors and land speculators are absolutely opposed to the interests of the home owner and the wage earner. It is natural that they should work for their own interests as other groups do, but it is not necessary to yield to them when the interests and welfare of the great mass of people are at stake.