

The Great National Hold-Up



THE conditions under which Capital, Labor and Enterprise are compelled to approach the development of this country are fairly pictured in the above cartoon.

It is an Unholy Alliance: Uncle Sam, the natural and sworn guardian of the interests of the whole people, betrays those interests to the mercy of a favored few. Like most atrocious crimes, this social betrayal springs not from malicious intent, so much as from sheer stupidity. It is manifest that Uncle Sam, while losing moral prestige in the act, gains nothing at all in material advantage. The toll he collects is a poor trifle compared with the colossal tribute levied by landlordism. He loses on both counts, moral and material; and cuts the sorry figure of a servant, rather than that of ally.

And what about the wards of Uncle Sam? Are the people still helpless political minors? By no means. Uncle Sam has, in the course of political evolution, passed from being guardian, to being a functionary with only delegated powers from the people. So that the social betrayal and stupidity we have charged to Uncle Sam really recoil upon the people themselves and only reflect their own moral and rational standards.

But what about the landowner as such? It is useless to

discuss his historical origins, his moral standards. The sufficiently obvious and important fact is that his titular ownership of the soil is in no sense an economic necessity. It produces no values. It merely enables him to absorb values created by other social or individual factors in the nation's economy. The mere title of ownership, if deprived of the power of appropriating values which it has not created, no longer economically concerns us. Like the titles of Duke, Baron, and other inherited relics, it may confer social distinction for a while.

But in the fiscal and economic field, the landowner, as such, has no justifiable claim to preferential treatment. Indeed, his ownership may be rightly considered as his pledge to the production of the values inherent in or attached to his land. It should be no title to non-productive holding. On the contrary, it should be his bond to production to the full extent of the common natural or social values it covers.

Under our present fiscal system, satirized in the above cartoon, the landowner is shown as collector of tribute from the uncompensated labor of others. This is the artificial, unnatural and absurd situation created by our laws. It can and must be altered.