

"not the highest but the first"

by FRED W. WORKMAN

IN the present agitation to give the Negro his rights it is well to keep in mind that many millions of white persons are also deprived of important rights in this country. Most people are poor and remain poor largely because they have never been granted their basic natural rights. Our legislation should protect all the underprivileged — not just those with a dark skin. That would not be fair.

A first step to alleviate poverty should be to restore these fundamental natural rights. Our Declaration of Independence asserts the right of all citizens to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The right to life presumes the right to the means of life. As sustenance comes from the earth, so the right to life implies access to the source of life—the earth.

In Biblical times Moses, recognizing the equal rights of all his people to the land, tried to establish these by dividing the land equally in every fiftieth year — characteristically known as the "Year of Jubilee." But the division never remained equal, for the shrewder ones soon took advantage of the others and the old inequality continued.

This equal right of all to a fair share of the earth in perpetuity continued largely as an unsolved and mis-

understood problem until the publication of *Progress and Poverty*. Its author, Henry George, saw land (exclusive of improvements) as a natural inheritance of all, and concomitantly, the rent of all land could and should be enjoyed by all. The land rent, taken as a tax, if applied gradually, could make all other taxes unnecessary. This ethical, just and equitable method would do much to alleviate poverty and would eventually restore to all citizens their natural rights in the earth.

If this seems like a drastic step, it is no more so than other changes of recent years. But since none were founded on sound economics all failed to accomplish what was promised. Henry George's proposal, which now remains to be tried, is one which can strengthen our economy and save it from the threat of socialism and communism.

With basic rights established, our responsible, able-bodied poor could begin to live as free men and women, and race problems would lose much of their emotional impact. Benjamin Franklin said, "an empty bag cannot stand upright." Henry George said, "this reform is not the highest in the ethical scale, but must be the first to make the others possible."

ICELAND'S ENLIGHTENED LAND POLICY

Frank F. Bille of Arcadia, California is the author of *UNTAX*, a booklet obtainable from him at the above address — P.O. Box 838. The price is 40 cents or three for a dollar.

Mr. Bille's research has revealed the following "remarkable facts about Iceland" by way of Denmark's Georgist journal, *Vejen Frem*. Ninety per cent of the Icelanders own their homes — even apartment units are individually owned. Therefore rent restrictions and land speculation are virtually nonexistent.

Practically all land suitable for building is publicly owned and made available on payment of an annual rental. Since home owners are not burdened with mortgage commitments or payments for land, the possibility of land speculation is circumvented and Icelanders who build for themselves seem also to enjoy larger than average floor space in their dwellings.