

# LAND-VALUE POLICY

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"LAND-VALUE PROBLEMS," ETC.

LONDON

PUBLISHED BY THE UNITED COMMITTEE  
FOR THE TAXATION OF LAND VALUES

11 TOTHILL STREET, S.W. 1

1924

X723.1

F7  
4210

## INTRODUCTION

THE master-problem of economics is to determine the proper relation of the people to the land on which they live, and from which they derive their sustenance and their wealth. Their rights to the land are bound up with their rights to life and liberty, because the right to life implies a right to the means of living, and liberty begins with the liberty to use the gifts of Nature to satisfy human needs. These rights are inherent and inalienable; the recognition of them is of the first importance; and they ought to be asserted at the earliest possible moment, any law, custom, or usage to the contrary notwithstanding.

This economic problem is at the root of the production of wealth, because all wealth is ultimately obtained from the land. It is at the root of the distribution of wealth, which in large measure follows, and is bound to follow, the distribution of the sources from which wealth is derived. It is at the root of all social and political questions, because the well-being, the prospects, and the contentment of a people depend on the extent to which they are enabled to make use of the natural opportunities.

Justice requires that all the people should have equal rights to the land which Nature has provided. The rights to land are of a comprehensive character, for they include the rights to the light that shines on it, to the wind that blows over it, to the rain that falls on it, to the springs that rise in it, to the streams that flow upon it, to the water-power, to the natural growths, to the use of the surface in a variety of ways, to the stone, the clay, the coal, the minerals, and the other materials which it contains, and to all else that pertains to the land and passes with a grant of it. These gifts of Nature, which are in no wise due to the agency of man, ought not to be the subjects of private property, but ought to be treated as the common property of the people, from generation to generation continuously.

In so far as the land is utilised by the people in their collective capacity, or is the subject of their common use or enjoyment, no difficulty arises. In so far as the land is in the hands of private persons, the people as a whole should be regarded as the super-landlord, and their right to the land should be enforced by requiring those who hold it to pay a rent or tax for it, this rent or tax in each case being based on the market value of the land apart from improvements, and being payable whether the land is used or not.

Land-value policy—the policy of taxing land-values and untaxing improvements—is founded on the recognition of the rights of the people to the land, and of the improver to the improvements. It would secure to the people the value which

attaches to the land in consequence of their presence and requirements. It would provide public revenue without burdening industry. It would, moreover, put a stop to the withholding of land from use, because the pressure of having to pay according to the market value of the land, whether the land was being used or not, would deter people from holding land idle and would cause them either to use it themselves, or to transfer it to others who would use it. The taxation of land-values would lay the axe to the root of land monopoly and make the land available for use; while the untaxing of improvements would promote its development.

Land-value policy is the true basis of reconstruction. Its direct effects would be to make the land more available for use and to promote production. Indirectly, it would prepare the way for the reform of land-tenure and the simplification of title to land. In its financial aspect, the increasing absorption of economic rent as public revenue would facilitate the corresponding abolition of taxes on production and exchange: whilst, from the International standpoint, the application of the policy in different countries would lay the economic foundations of prosperity and peace.

J. D. W.

*January, 1924.*

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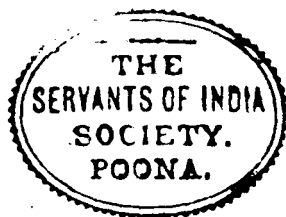
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