

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



Land Nationalisation

Freedom Press (London)

October, 1887

Freedom Press (London)
Land Nationalisation
October, 1887

Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Socialism, Vol. 2, No. 13, online
source RevoltLib.com, retrieved on April 12, 2020.

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

The rupture between Henry George and the American Socialists at the Syracuse Convention whence the Social-Democrat delegates were excluded, will deeply afflict many of Henry George's supporters in this country. Having received from his powerful attacks against the idle land-grabbers their first impulse towards Socialism, and having seen in him one of those who undoubtedly have contributed towards preparing the ground for Socialist ideas in this country, they will be grieved to see the man whom they considered as an earnest champion of the oppressed, turning now his back on the workers and entering into a union with the middle-class.

For a union with the middle-class it was, this Syracuse convention of the United Labor Party, at which Labor was not represented, even by a feeble minority; while lawyers (fourteen lawyers!), doctors, parsons, employers, and grocers fully represented all fractions of the middle-classes Its platform is a middle-class platform throughout.

Many of Henry George's supporters will be deeply grieved at what they will consider as his new departure. But if they now revert

to what was the real meaning of his teachings since the very first day he began to expound them, they will see that his present tactics constitute no new departure at all; and they will understand why the middle-classes have shown, from the beginning, so much sympathy with his teachings. The present position of Henry George is a logical development of the ideas he has professed since his first start; and the whole doctrine of land nationalization--as it has been expounded and professed in this country--never was anything but a theory inspired by the desire of the middle-classes to have the lion's share in the profits and political importance derived from the possession of land. What we say now is not new; many years since, comrade Hyndman powerfully exposed the defects of the land nationalization schemes; and neither Social-Democrats nor Anarchists have entertained delusions as to their real meaning.

When the land-nationalizers denounce the idlers who pocket the surplus-value given to land by the aggregate efforts of the whole of the nation, one can but fully agree with them. But one is inclined to ask, why they, who are so keenly conscious of the evils of private appropriation of land and so boldly denounce them, are so blind as not to perceive the evils which have arisen in our industrial and trading century from the appropriation by the few of the unearned increment on the industrial field? How is it to be explained that the identity of the two means of appropriating for the rich the fruits of the labor of the poor escapes them, while it is clear even to the most bourgeois of writers? and how is it that they continue to launch their thunders against one class only of the two great classes of exploiters?

The rank and file of the land-nationalizers -- those honest workers who earnestly believe that land nationalization is preached in the interest of the workers do not understand how anybody can denounce the land-grabber, only that he may the better become a land-grabber himself, and they answer to these questions, "Let us only undermine the landed property, its evils are better felt and un-

their teachings, surely will be grieved by their own mistake. But they will profit by the lesson.

They will know that the great words, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, Home Rule, Radicalism, Socialism, and Anarchism, may be mere words. All depends upon the contents, and they will see that the contents may be best judged by the means proposed to attain the end.

Shabby means imply a shabby end. Those who propose to change all the present state of society,, put an end to oppression, put an end to poverty, regenerate social life by a few shabby means-whatever the title they assume-have no grand end before them. They usurp grand names to cover the hollowness of their contents.

derstood; then the capitalist oppression will receive a mortal blow at the same time."

Immense illusion! because the real result of the land nationalization schemes would be to divert from the middle-classes the blow which the working-classes are preparing to strike at their exploiters, and to direct it to their only competitor in exploiting--the landlord. During the Chartist movement the workman was used by the middle-classes to snatch away the political power from the landed aristocracy. Now he is to be used to snatch from them the land, and to hand over this real foundation of all power to the middle-classes.

The rank and file are too honest to see it; but the leaders know well that it is precisely so. And H. George himself is not mistaken on the subject. In his last leader in the Standard (September 10th) he openly says: "It is evident that the change would profit the capitalists and laborers," and he goes so far as to argue that "we have few capitalists who are not laborers."

The bourgeois leaders of the land nationalization movement are perfectly aware that their scheme would first profit capitalists, just because it would increase the range covered by capital and we know on that everything which profits capitalists and widens the field of their : powers will ultimately result in a further enslaving of the workmen.

In fact, two separate things must be distinguished in land nationalization schemes: the title, and the contents; the banner with its fine inscription, and the merchandise covered with the banner.

The banner which bears the words "Land Nationalization" may be indicative of a grand aim; but all depends upon what is understood by land nationalization. It may mean the nation taking possession of the land; everybody entitled to till the soil if he likes, everybody entitled freely to organize in order to produce plenty of food for humanity. It may mean also and so it did in France by the end of the last century--the State confiscating the estates of the priests and nobles, and selling them to those who have the money

to buy; that is partly to peasants, but chiefly to the "Black Bands " of 1793, the bands of money-grabbers enriched by speculating on the people's starvation, or on card-board soled shoes supplied to the armies of the Republic. It may mean even less, and so indeed it does, for in the mouths of our Land Restorers and Nationalizers it simply means this: Everything remains as it is. But a Parliament converted to the ideas of land nationalization imposes heavy taxes on land values, and thus compels the rascal lords to sell their estates. That is the bottom of all land nationalization schemes, nothing else has been preached by their supporters.

No revolution, of course, no sudden changes. No expropriation of manufactures, or railways; that would spoil the scheme. The East-end people must continue to starve, and the West-end people to squander the money; cottagers' families must continue to live on nine shillings a-week; parliament be elected as it is now, money remain almighty; but the landlords are to be compelled by the said parliament to sell their estates.

The dream of the turnip-jam cotton-silk, and poisoned beer manufacturers is realized. One poor furniture-millionaire who died the other day, notwithstanding his millions, never could attain his ideal of being proprietor of a "Shaftesbury Castle" and invite hunting parties there ! All his life long he was compelled to stamp his note-paper merely "Three Poplar's Mansion!" Why did he not live on until the land taxation scheme of the supposed Land Nationalizers had become a reality ? But the retired butcher next door hopes not to die without having seen it, and then he will finally buy the long-coveted corner of the park on the top of the hill, and erect there his castle decorated with his leg-of-mutton arms. I understand that he, too, is a Land Nationalizer! The nation--it is he, and the nationalization is nothing but a taxation which will permit him, too, to have a park and a castle. He can pay the Georgite taxes for the corner of the park while Lord So-and-So is enable to pay them for the whole of the park.

And, while our furniture-millionaire's and our retired butcher's will peaceably enjoy life in their mansions, creating twenty parks where there was one, the remainder of the land will be bought by capital-owners who are now at their wit's end where to invest their capital and a new landed aristocracy as bad as the old one will issue from the scheme The bourgeois will become the owner of the land, the manufactures, the railways, the trade!

Maybe, the amount of cultivated land and of corn grown in this country will increase. There will be no need to import so much corn as we do now. But, will the workmen be better paid for his labor? Who will pay the land-taxes--who can pay any taxes at all if it is not the producer of wealth, the laborer who pays them with his labor? And if he dares to claim more than nine shillings a-week, can he not be ousted by Chinese and Hindus who will be satisfied with three shillings a-week? Can the laborer who has no capital beyond his own hands afford to compete with the capital-owners in the prices they will offer to the State, in case the State should retain its rights in land, and rent it to the person who offers most for it ? Can the laborer compete with the capitalist, who can afford to pay more because he can get good machinery, and import Chinese to serve it, with the money stolen from the workman's pocket?

The middle-classes have understood at once that the land nationalization scheme, being a mere scheme of land taxation, is much to their profit. Therefore, their tenderness to the scheme and their harshness to Socialism. What a pity that so many honest workers, led by loud phrases of sympathy and by the word Nationalization inscribed on the banner, have followed the Land Reformer's day without asking themselves, What does it cover?

We are not grieved about what is described as a new departure of the Land Nationalizers. There is no new departure at all; they have remained what they were, advocates of land taxation. Feeling hindered by their Socialist tail, they have merely cut it off. That in all. Those honest workers who joined their leagues for their banner's sake without inquiring more closely into the real content of