

Transcription (from hardcopy), March 2015:

Mark Lane Express 51(3 Oct. 1881): 1351b-1351c (A. C. Swinton).

[p. 1351b]

‘Nationalisation of the Land.’

Sir,—That land, which is the gift of Nature to the common good, and on which all life and well-being depend, should be monopolised by an portion of a nation is a condition of things only possible through the ignorance of the millions thus stripped of their birthright, as, in its destructive results it is a crime so vast that gradual usage and the general blindness have alone made it possible. To realise the enormity of this wrong all interested in the well-being of their race, as well as their own, should carefully study that greatest work of our age upon this all-important theme, “Progress and Poverty,” now in its sixth edition.

How this systematic violation of the people’s rights has been legalized by the legislating appropriators of the land and others interested in maintaining in perpetuity this monopoly, it is needless to discuss now; and it is of small consequence compared with its existence, and the best means of for ever abolishing it. The author of the work, above referred to proposes to have the land practically nationalised by retaxing it to its rental value, and so effecting the essential requirements of the nation, as the land-tax, perhaps, mainly did before the ancestors of the present chief landowners converted themselves from landlords into landowners; but, with the warmest admiration for the humanity and masterly power evinced in Mr. George’s work, and its priceless value as a whole, his *mode* of applying the only just, effective, and permanent solution of the land question seems far less inviting and hopeful than that devised by Mr. Alfred Russell Wallace, and adopted by the Land Nationalisation Society, over which he presides.

The cardinal principles of this scheme are:—

1.—That the land alone is to become the property of the State. The houses, buildings, private roads, fences, and the increased value given to the land by drainage or other permanent improvements remain the property of the owner and constitute his tenant-right, saleable or transferable at pleasure.

2.—That *all* land must be held direct from the State, and solely for the personal use and enjoyment of the occupier, no sub-letting being permitted. The fair net rental value of all the landed property of the United Kingdom having been determined by a general valuation of every separate enclosure of land, the rental value thus shown would in each case be divided into two portions, one representing the value of the land itself, the other, the additional value given to it by the owners or occupiers. The first of these two portions would be the quit-rent payable by the occupier to the State; the other portion would be the annual value of a tenant-right, to be purchased or otherwise acquired from the owner by the tenant and thereafter to give to his owner the right to occupy the land under the State, subject to revision (say once in a generation), to adjust any important change in value. The amount to be paid the owner for the portion of his property represented by the tenant-right would be fixed at a certain number of years’ purchase, to be settled by the valuers according to the circumstances of each case; and this sum would be payable by the tenant, unless the tenant-right already belongs to him; or, where the tenant-right cannot be bought at once, it may be paid for by a terminable rental—the tenant being secured against losing any of his payments (less five per cent. interest) should he fail to complete the purchase. As full compensation to the owner for

that portion of the land value resumed by the State, he would awarded a Government annuity of the same amount as the quit-rent, payable to himself for his life, and afterwards to his direct descendants to the second generation (that is to his sons and grandsons), and also to any remoter surviving lineal descendants, should any such be living at the date when the Act becomes law. In case of his having no direct descendants, the annuity would be continued to his brothers and sisters for their lives, or to any *one* more remote collateral relative, or any other person to whom he may transfer or bequeath it.

Thus the occupier, or owner of the tenant-right—whether of a farm or other land, of a house or any buildings, in country or town—would hold such property for occupation or business use only—not to traffic in its sale. Subject to this occupation principle, estates, of course, of any size or value might be held by any person under Mr. Wallace’s scheme—simply and freely, so securing, as it would, the abolition of the fictitious and oppressive increase of land and house values and the system of unsound house-building and rack-renting, so destructive to the health, means, and prospects of its many victims. The scheme also has the great advantage of simplicity and economy in its working, of preventing the possibility of jobbery, of being gradual in its application, and is, in the vast national blessings to be effected by its realisation, far less injurious to landowners, through the portion of the land value to be thus resumed by the State, several generations hence, than public necessities have before justified.

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The Alfred Russel Wallace Page, Charles H. Smith, 2015.