

Transcription, March 2015:

*Pall Mall Gazette* 37(5596) (6 Feb. 1883): 2 (anon.).

[p. 2]

‘Some Points for “Nationalizers.”’

To the Editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Sir,—The main point of Mr. A. R. Wallace’s radical reform of land tenure, as explained in his book and repeated in his letter the other day, is the abolition of landlordism, which means, in more precise language, making the contract of letting and hiring as applied to immovable property illegal, or at all events unenforceable. I wonder if Mr. Wallace has thought of the bearing this would have on several of the common uses of life. When a dweller in the country (say a member of Parliament) wants to spend some months of the year in the town, he hires a house in town, and, if he can, lets his own in the country. So, if the occupier of a house is ordered to travel for health’s sake, he tries to reduce his charges by letting the house while he is away. The townsman who seeks the country for a holiday, and is not rich enough to have a country house of his own or live in inns, takes lodgings by the week or the month. And a large proportion of town folk of all ranks, from the peerage downwards, live in hired rooms, not choosing to have the trouble of housekeeping or not being able to afford it.

All these arrangements would be swept away by Mr. Wallace’s reform. It would be impossible for a man to pass a night, except as an invited guest, anywhere but in his own house on an inn—that is, if we may assume that the “abolition of landlordism” is not to extend to innkeepers. There are many people who, for convenience of finding work and otherwise, deliberately prefer not to commit themselves to one dwelling-place for any length of time: all these would be saddled with the “occupying ownership” of a fixed abode whether they liked it or not. Again, the practice of living in flats, which is gradually increasing in large towns, and is found convenient by people of many sorts (as shown by the character of the buildings, from Queen Anne’s Mansions to model artisans’ dwellings), would be no less outlawed by Mr. Wallace’s grand plan. Altogether, it seems a curious way of promoting the happiness of mankind, and especially those who are of a frugal mind. But perhaps this, like the periodical revision of quit rent, is one of the trifling details which Mr. Wallace has forgotten to mention, and he means to except lodgings from his universal denunciation of landlordism. In that case another little objection occurs. I wonder how Mr. Wallace proposes to frame any such exception so as to prevent it from being used in various colourable ways for the wholesale evasion of his proposed rules against letting. Indeed, I should like to know whether Mr. Wallace, or Mr. George, or any of their supporters, have seriously considered at all the enormous difficulty of devising any measure against “landlordism” in this sense which would not, with or without the aid of admitted exceptions, be evaded wholesale. Parliament has more than once attempted sweeping restrictions on dealings with land, and in every case legal ingenuity has been too much for the wisdom and good (or bad) intentions of the Legislature. Will some of the “nationalizers,” instead of giving us magnificent phrases, employ a competent real property lawyer to draft a bill for carrying out their purposes and see how it looks? In short, in order to make “nationalization” effective, it would not be enough only to pass a law for abolishing the relation of landlord and tenant; it would be needful to produce such a revolution in public opinion that not only a working political majority, but the people at large, would cheerfully obey the law when made, and fulfil it in spirit as well as in letter. Were that revolution produced, the law of landlord and tenant would simply fall into desuetude for want of tenants

and landlords, and become, like many other parts of the law, an antiquarian curiosity which we might expressly abolish at any time when we had nothing else to do. But I do not expect either Mr. Wallace or Mr. George to bring about that consummation in our days.—

I am, Sir, your obedient servant, F.

February 5.

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