

## CHAPTER XXXI

### POVERTY VS. MONOPOLY

**I**N these writings concerning the fate of those on board the good ship *Earth* we first sought the basis of life and found it in the soil and the water under certain conditions of climate.

We then weighed the elements of food and found the old planet provided with all that the passengers are likely to need if the terrestrial stock of the goods of life is properly conserved and used. We looked into the question of the use and the abuse of the treasures of our ship's hold and decided that the self-evident truth that they belong to us in common must be recognized and made effective to every man through institutions if the gross evils from which we have always suffered are to be remedied. These institutions can come through the activities of one form of govern-

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ment only, and that is democracy; because it is only in a democracy that the ruling class as a whole is selfishly interested in the reign of the principle of equality of rights and opportunities.

In other words, the welfare of all men must be attained, if at all, by the rule of all men.

Universal welfare means, first of all, the extirpation of poverty. Many things must be added to that, but that comes first in any rational scheme of social redemption. Souls are, no doubt, more important than bodies; but the bodies which are not fed, all over the world, are those in which the souls are darkened and the spirits dead. Millenniums, like armies, march upon their stomachs.

I have looked upon monopoly as the cause of poverty. It seems to me that the poverty with which most of us are familiar is clearly due to monopoly, and to that alone. The monopoly of land turns into private hands all those stupendous rivers of wealth which would be distributed to all men if we as a people received each year from those who exclude us

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the value of the privilege in such monopoly. This seems to me to account for all the poverty we have, at least we of the western world. In other words, it seems perfectly clear to me that we could carry all other parasites, though of course we ought not to do so, if we were rid of the exactions of those who own our city lots, our water-fronts and terminals, our forest lands, our mineral lands, our power sites, our factory sites and our agricultural lands.

Moreover, if all the other parasites were exterminated, the land monopoly would at once swallow up the benefits of the riddance, and we should be no better off than now, save for the simplicity of the situation.

But in addition to the basic monopoly of the decks of the good ship *Earth*, there are a thousand other monopolies. There is the great semi-land-monopoly of the railways. There are tariff-bred monopolies. There are the little fly-bite monopolies of the patent office. There are money trusts and shipping trusts. There are huge aggregations of tools like those

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of the steel trust. Some say that the ownership of tools would alone enslave the workers. This may be so—but common ownership of tools would do the workers no good at all so long as land is monopolized. Until that underlying monopoly is abolished and a just system of land tenure put into effect the success of those who seek better things for the masses will serve no good purpose except to strip the disguises from the great robber “who takes all that is left,” no matter how much it may be. A just land system may open the way for the cooperative commonwealth—which, if erected upon our present land system, so far as it succeeded, would only enrich landlords. The workers of Ghent have established the cooperative commonwealth in almost everything save land; and have made their landlords richer than ever.

Cooperation is an improvement in production. By it the middlemen are eliminated, duplication of labor is lessened, division of labor is increased, production is systematized; but no possible perfection of cooper-

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ation can hope to do as much in the line of cheapening the things needed by the people as has been done by the progress and invention of the past two hundred years, in science, the arts, in transportation, in finance, in the opening up of new lands, in labor saving machinery. In the absence of a just system of land tenure these wonderful advances have failed to help the masses to a free and unfearing life—but rents have gone up enormously, and the purchase-price of lands has soared. So with the cooperative commonwealth—it will be an improvement in production; but we have had a hundred improvements in that which have done the workers no good; it will simplify distribution; but no more than the railway and the steamship and the dynamo, none of which has lightened the burdens of poverty; it will prevent duplication of effort, but so do the trusts. With a just system of land tenure the progress of science and the arts would have abolished poverty; and with such a just basis for life, the cooperative com-

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monwealth will carry us to heights we can not otherwise attain.

With monopoly abolished, and with society organized on the basis of a fraternal democracy, will poverty be at an end?

Unless it is at an end, our social travail will have been in vain. We shall have opened the natural opportunities which the earth offers freely to all. We shall have so organized exchange and distribution as to eliminate all possible wastes. We shall have ended the system by which one man makes a profit on the labor of another. We shall have secured to every worker the full product of his labor. And we shall have made labor universal.

Poverty could not persist under such conditions, except as the result of the multiplication of population to the point beyond which the earth is unable to support the people. Universal comfort, universal education, universal enlightenment, the complexity of life which so highly developed a society would necessitate, would tend to cut down the birth-rate—

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just as it is now cut down in the most "comfortably-fixed" portions of society.

But the extirpation of monopoly must go along with general enlightenment, not only in the nation, but in the whole world, or there will always remain those world slums in which the unfit breed and spawn in poverty and ignorance. I do not believe that there is much danger that we of the United States, of Great Britain and Ireland, of France, Germany, Italy, Austria—of all the most advanced nations of this age—will fail to redeem ourselves from monopoly and its consequent poverty, and to attain a balance of births and deaths, long before we have out-multiplied our means of sustenance; but I do think that in Asia, in Africa, and in some parts of Europe there are great peoples who are already near the limits of subsistence, or even pressing against it, or so low in development as apparently to require ages to reach the point of decreasing fecundity. Some of these have beliefs concerning the desirability of large families of children which are recognized by

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such statesmen as Yuan Shi Kai as barriers to improvement in circumstances. It seems to me that along with our own problems, we more fortunate passengers on the good ship *Earth* must assume the burden of lifting these nations up. Otherwise our very millennium will be their opportunity to overrun the world in sheer weight of numbers—and plunge it lower than ever in hopeless poverty. Or we may be presented with the awful alternative of racial submergence, or the segregation of these unfortunate races from the rest of the earth's peoples forever, by force of arms.