

Land and Freedom

FORMERLY THE SINGLE TAX REVIEW

VOL. XXXVI

MARCH—APRIL, 1936

No. 2

Comment and Reflection

NOW, Mr. Trades Unionist, let us have a word with you. Perhaps you are satisfied that you have kept your wages up even at the expense of other workers' wages. As things are, every increase of wages in your craft must result in increased cost, though this is frequently compensated for in increased efficiency. On the whole, however, increase of wages secured by labor combinations must result in increased cost to the general public. The cases where this does not occur appear to be negligible.

THERE is another aspect of the question that does not occur to you. Suppose it were possible for wages generally to be increased by the unions. What would be the result? It will be strange to you to be told that you would then be no better off. We are speaking now not of money wages but real wages, or what money wages will buy. We are considering the resultant increase in the cost of commodities. We are considering something more removed, but something that is inevitable. It is rent, economic rent, which demands and must continue to demand until conditions are remedied, the lion's share of any general wage increase.

IT will be news to the trade unionist that he would be working for the landowner were any general wage increase at all possible. With every stroke of the hammer, with every fall of the pick, the toll to the landowner must be paid. Rent, economic rent, is the monster whose food is every increase of wages, every addition to production, every machine, even every cultural advance. When this is diverted into private channels it is the engine of enslavement for the worker, and what might be his beneficent servitor is in fact his merciless Frankenstein. He cannot escape it.

IT sounds strange, this talk of "the dignity of labor," which must be maintained by "collective bargaining." That dignity is evidently of a very tenuous nature that has to be maintained by trade union devices, by these efforts to extort some slight percentage of wage

increase. And there is another reflection that should occur to you. It is that as a trade unionist you give tacit consent to more than one economic fallacy. The first is that wages are paid by the employer—in other words, are drawn from capital. Does labor with its "dignity" believe that? Evidently the trade unionist does. Otherwise he would see the futility of the trade union idea to bring about any permanent improvement. The gains that have been made are pitifully small.

THE last resort when collective bargaining fails is a kind of civil war. Can that be reconciled with any reasonable solution of the labor problem? This arraying of labor against capital cannot be the solution of labor's difficulties and is surely not in accord with the idea of the dignity of labor, for it is a confession of a subordinate position that lacks all dignity. It lends strength to the patronizing attitude of politicians in their professed eagerness to "do something for labor."

IS there any recognition among the labor union leaders of the true relation of labor to capital? Is capital recognized as the associate with labor in the work of production, and not labor's "boss?" If so we do not know of them. The labor unionist merely seeks to extort more from capital by threats of combination, by collective bargaining, and at the end the last resort, a strike. Strange reflection this upon the so-called "dignity of labor."

NOT labor unionism but a true political economy restores this dignity. It shows that wages are not paid by the employer, are not drawn from capital, but are a part of the product, less that which goes to capital as interest and to land as rent, the last of which belongs to all men who labor to be expended for communal expenses instead of being appropriated by private persons. It is the exclusion of men from the land, the denial of a place to work, that robs labor of its dignity and makes him a suppliant to capital which must also bargain with the land owner for a place to work. Does the labor unionist recognize this? He does not. If he wins he is satisfied with gains so pitifully small that his own con-