

As the World Burns

By Mike Curtis

Greetings Voters:

Today, inflation is down but ever present; housing rents keep rising faster than wages, and homeownership is progressively harder to achieve. Heat waves and severe weather are increasing, and the conflict in Ukraine portends a nuclear war. All this, and another recession, is on schedule for 2026.

In spite of this, it is possible that the next election will be decided over whether women have a political right to an abortion. As important as it is to people on both sides, it looks like the big donors, the landlord monopolist billionaires, are simply using abortion as a way to sway the voters while preserving their unearned incomes.

Right now, the polls show that Donald Trump and Joe Biden are tied in popularity. Whether it is racism, nationalism, fascism, or a new version of Elmer Gantry, the world has seen these movies before.

Trump promised his working-class followers that he would make America great again. They will all be proud to be Americans, and they will have Bully Trump as their alter-ego.

Trump says we can't afford to raise the Minimum Wage — which would raise all wages by the same amount. He says we can not afford national healthcare in spite of the fact that it would cost far less per person than Americans pay right now. Nonetheless, tens of millions of workers did and will likely vote for him again.

What he thought America could afford was a tax cut for the rich and the super-rich, because, with their tax savings, he thought they would make job creating investments.

If he gets elected again, he will increase the focus on Law & Order and finish the wall. Then, no uneducated person from Latin America will be able to waltz across the border and compete with Americans for the lowest-paying jobs. He will do his best to see that no African American who is trying to get a job, buy a house, or go to college will get any preferential treatment because, for more than a hundred years, the government allowed their ancestors to be enslaved. And for another hundred and fifty years after that, governments maintained a cruel caste system (Jim Crow) that oppressed their descendants.

Trump has not put forth any policy that would force more land into production — yielding jobs, raising wages, or makehousing more affordable. Nor has he said how he will prevent the next recession. But, if he gets elected in 2024 his followers will feel like citizens of “A Great America again!”

Now, what are Joe Biden and the Democrats offering? A decrease in the cost of some prescription drugs, an increase in the Minimum Wage, more affordable college for those with a scholarly aptitude, and more welfare for those who actually need it. These programs ameliorate some of our social problems, but the only reason the Democrats look good is that the Republicans are so much worse.

Biden and the Democrats could stand for shifting taxes to the value of land. That would create the incentives needed to bring about more jobs and housing in the free-market. And, depending on how widely it was applied, it would ameliorate or even prevent the next recession.

However, the reality is: The Democratic Party stands for a kinder gentler form of exploitation. By comparison, their policies are far better for the working class. But, both the Republican and Democratic parties fully endorse the exploitive institution of private property in land.

The value of land, which includes oil, other minerals, and the airwaves, results from the diversities of nature and its exclusive possession. Title to land is necessary to secure to the people who make them, buildings and other products made upon it.

The increase in population permits greater divisions and specializations of labor and economies of scale. This multiplies the results of labor via trade. The infrastructure and public service enable denser populations and more efficient cooperation, which increases productivity proportionally and therefore, the value of land.

Because land is essential to life, and its value is socially created, its title confers a measurable advantage. Therefore, it is an equitable source of public revenue — a charge for the value of the benefits received. Because the value of land increases in harmony with the evolution of community and the increasing needs of social growth, it is a natural source of public revenue.

Yet, neither party acknowledges land as a common opportunity. It is called property and treated as a foundational institution, as though justice permits one person to own the land on which another must live — where one person may take a large portion of what another produces by virtue of their title deed to the gift of nature.

The Democrats are willing to limit exploitation by insuring workers a minimum standard of well-being: Minimum wage laws, occupational safety, and rent controls. But, in spite of the fact that it would incentivize an increase in the number of jobs and units of housing, in spite of the fact that it would actually increase the potential income and the selling value of land, the Democratic Party does not support a local (state, county, or city) shift to land value taxation.

It is not because Democrats want to speculate with idle land; the majority of either party does not practice that. They are against land value taxation because, at some point in the far future, all taxes might shift to the value of land. At some time after that, the full rental value of all privately held land might be collected throughout the entire country for the equal benefit of all the people — just as Henry George advocated.

And if that happened, the income from the ownership of land would fall to zero. No individual or corporation would then enjoy an income from the bounty of nature; no individual would be able to capture wealth that was not the result of individual or corporate productions but was the synergistic result of the conscious and subconscious cooperation of the community as a whole. It is the abolition of this unwarranted exploitive income that conservative Republicans and liberal (kinder and gentler) Democrats find unacceptable.

Nearly a trillion dollars a year is spent on education. Yet, most people need to learn that private property in land, and the non-use and under-use it engenders, is the cause of unemployment, low wages, and the high cost of housing.

Land value taxation at full value would make land a common asset with employment, rising wages, and affordable housing. But the Democrats, who will not endorse it, are willing to spend a trillion dollars a year on welfare, even more than is spent on the military, as a humanitarian gesture and a way to keep beggars, crime, and communicable disease from so reducing productivity that the income from the land would fall even more.

We can look for a charismatic savior and elect them as president, but little evidence has ever brought about a just society. We have a system where adults can vote and collectively choose their representatives. Few places have rank choice voting, and few issues are decided by referendum, which would bring us closer to democracy. But, when most people agree that something is of paramount importance, governments generally deliver.

The voters must think for themselves. They must distinguish natural opportunities from the products of human endeavor, wealth that is privately produced from that which is socially produced, businesses in which all can compete, and businesses that are in their natural monopolies and must be socially owned and government-run. Then, they can elect those who will legislate and govern in the people's best interest.

There is no evidence that the natural world has not provided ample resources, and then some, for all the people on this earth right now. And I have every reason to believe: With common ownership of land (via land value taxation), free migration, and free trade, all the peoples of this world could live happy, productive, and prosperous lives without degrading the earth and its environment.