

Reflections on Earth Day for the 50th Time

By Mike Curtis
4-22-20

When the first Earth Day was being celebrated, I had recently been acquainted with "Progress and Poverty" by Henry George. I thought to myself, 'now there is a marriage,' the paramount need for sustainability in preserving our species, and the requisite to a just and prosperous civilization—equal rights to the Earth.

We know the current level of pollution and carbon emissions are not sustainable. And while the people and corporations who profit from polluting and emitting carbon deny their actions as destructive, agree that the Earth must be preserved for future generations.

I suppose the profits are high, and the admiration that comes from being rich is intoxicating that they are willing to add to the environment's destruction. Simultaneously, they are rationalizing their actions will not be large enough to be the ultimate cause of our demise. And if they didn't pollute or emit the carbon, someone else would. The net result for them would be the loss of their fortune, and the level of pollution and carbon emission would be no different than before. It's like saying one vote makes no difference; I don't waste my time.

Yet despite these severe industrial polluters, the majority of people practice respect for Mother Earth. They don't excessively pollute, they do recycle, and an increasing number are driving electric cars. The majority of Americans are definitely in favor of preserving a healthy, sustainable environment that prevents global warming.

However, does anyone expect that an unemployed person and behind on their mortgage or rent, or even anxious about paying them and getting enough food and healthcare will become an activist and demand legislation that preserves the environment? No one expected the chattel slaves to be concerned with the sustainability of land growing cotton, and we don't expect the wage slaves who pay all they can to not be homeless, to focus on the health of the planet. Of course, it is hard to imagine anyone who had no other problems and wouldn't advocate for the Earth.

What no measurable segment of the population has addressed is that nearly half the people in the US and the vast majority of the people in the world have no right to any part of this Earth's surface. And the majority of those who do, only own a few thousand square feet of land that comes with their house. This is the same planet we are equally and dependent upon, and we call Mother Earth. We sing her songs and sound her praises: "This land was meant for you and me."

The sad reality is that those dependent upon others for a place to live and work are exploited to the same extent as the chattel slaves of 19th century America. Each worker is free to choose his employer, and if he or she has unique skills, many employers will compete to hire them with significantly higher wages. Their pay will be no more than just enough that were the wages of any particular group of workers lowered, there would be a shortage of skill and knowledge in their operations, and productivity would fall.

Wages of the least productive workers, the least skilled and educated, tend to an amount below sustainability. These workers would get weak and sick, and productivity would fall. We have intervened with the legal Minimum Wage and the eight-hour day. The shortage of jobs and housing improve with charity and welfare.

But, to have a democracy in which the government acts in the people's interest—preserving the environment and facilitating the cooperation of the people as equal participants, there are certain requisites. All people must have an equal right to enjoy the bounty of nature; they must have an equal share in the socially created values that attach to the land, and they must have an exclusive right to the fruits of their labor. In other words, the right to vote must come with an equal opportunity to work and own the results of your labor as well as an equal share in the socially created values that attach to the Earth. Without it, the idea of freedom and independence is about as valid as "pulling yourself up by the bootstraps". You can't make anything out of nothing.

We must abolish private property in land and assert our equal and inalienable rights to Earth's materials and opportunities. We need only make the title to land conditional upon the payment of its rental value, and abolish all taxes. We will enfranchise all the people with a livelihood and a vested interest in creating a sustainable Earth for ourselves and our posterity.