

Sovereignty And Migration

By Mike Curtis

What gives a country the right to secure its borders, and exist as a sovereign state? If we surveyed the history of the 194 countries in the world today, it's doubtful that any of them are populated by the descendants of the people who first discovered the uninhabited land. But, if one of those countries was still occupied by those descendants it would not give them a moral right to the exclusive possession of the land in perpetuity. No group of people have a greater moral right to a portion of the Earth than others.

History is largely a series of conquests involving extermination or subjection and exploitation. Yet, people have rights — which are simply the universal feelings inherent in all people: That they are entitled to their own existence. Our existence is dependent upon food, clothing, and shelter, the products of our exertions. Therefore, to the extent that any of it is taken from us, our right to life has been infringed upon.

At the same time we are inherently dependent upon land, the surface of the Earth. It is on it that we live, and from it we grow our food, make our clothing, shelter and everything we consume. Yet, every acre of land does not offer the same quality of opportunity. That is the premise upon which it is declared that all people have an equal right to the Earth.

As communities transition from hunting and gathering to growing crops the family becomes the individual unit within the community. Land is divided among families. In order to ensure that people can keep securely what they produce (crops, buildings, etc). And as long as all plots are generally equal in quality, no family has an advantage over others. However, in time, as population increases and the quality of land being assigned is less fertile or desirable, the same title that simply gave an opportunity to keep what people produced, offers those with superior land an increasing advantage. There is a natural diversity in climate and the content of land, which, as civilization evolves, affects the desirability of inherent qualities like deposits of tin before and after the bronze age. As people come together in communities, the productive power of individuals is increased by trade. The larger and denser the population, the greater the subdivisions of labor and specializations of tools and machines, the greater the results. The larger and denser populations are enabled and cooperation is improved by the infrastructure and the administrative functions of government. Trade is the genus of civilization.

People are naturally drawn to the most fertile soil, and they concentrate in areas with natural harbors where rivers join — areas like New York and Baltimore that evolve into

cities. There, all the increase in productivity, which derives from larger and denser populations is taken by the owners of the land. Because the best quality land that is still freely accessible is always sparsely populated, and the densely populated land is owned, the far greater productivity resulting from cooperation is taken by the owners of land, just as much as if the land itself were superior. This greater productivity is socially created. That is, cannot be attributed to the efforts of individuals (or corporations), but results from the conscious and subconscious cooperation of the community as a whole. In anticipation of its increase in the value, land is held unused and under used as an appreciating asset. Non-use and under-use creates a shortage of land, eliminating the free-land opportunity for self employment, wasting the infrastructure and public service, and causing unemployment, stagnant wages and a shortage of housing.

However, by making land titles conditional upon a payment of their rental value, governments could eliminate taxes that take what people produce. With payments from the rental value of land governments could maintain the infrastructure and their administrative functions, which enable denser populations with far greater productivity, and it would insure that all valuable land was put to full use. It would create full employment, and re-create the free-land alternative. The free-land opportunity would raise wages everywhere (no one would work for others unless they received as good a living as they could produce where the land is free), and it would preserve the wilderness from development.

Here is a socially created fund that grows with population. Here is a fund that generates far more than is needed to support the traditional functions of government. Here is a fund that could support national healthcare, social security, medical and environmental research. Here is an economic system in which the increase in population would enhance the lives of all its residents until there were so many people that adding one more person would reduce the productivity of all people — the point of diminishing returns.

Clearly there is no moral right of nations to secure their borders to the exclusion of others. However, if governments conduct themselves democratically, collect the rental value of land and spend it for the benefit of all their residents, and finally, grant the people of all regions of the world the right to migrate with open borders, then the resources of the Earth would be shared as a common stock. No people in any country would be advantaged by the gifts of nature, and no people would be deprived of the results of cooperation. The motivations for war would dissipate, and international cooperation would take civilization to new heights.