

Land Ownership under Anarchism

A continuation of my open letter to anarcho-socialists.

Land, as defined in economic science, is all natural resources to which supply is inherently fixed. All economic systems, such as capitalism and socialism, require land, since all capital goods are made from land. Alongside capital and labor, land is one of the factors of production man utilizes.

Land ownership is one area socialists oppose capitalists on. The former believes land ought to be collectively owned, while the latter believes it ought to be individually owned. Socialists argue capital accumulation stunts production, could lead to hoarding natural resources, and violates the natural law.

Stunts production. Some socialists, like Karl Marx in his *Das Kapital* (1867), argue that individualist land ownership would lead to several counter-productive factors. Like investing in capital instead of labor (though these two are often invested in), surpluses become profits of the owners instead of “trickling down” to laborers (this is often because of a statist environment, not capitalist; as this is seen in state socialism), and the acquisition of capital occurs through violence. The latter point is only true in authoritarian systems, not inherently capitalist.

Hoarding natural resources. According to John Locke’s labor theory of property (a.k.a., the Lockean proviso), private property is anything that an individual has mixed his labors in. Such as land, only if the individual is actively using the land. Thomas Paine wrote in *Agrarian Justice* (1797) that man “did not make the earth. It is the value of the improvements only, and not the earth itself, that is individual property.” In other words, neither a capitalist or a socialist can hoard resources, they must use them.

Without a central bank or government offering land-owners special protections, bailouts and subsidies, redistribution of wealth, and regulations that stifle competition, a land-owner would have to cultivate his land or face losing wealth. Not to mention the market theory of reputation where a bad name would hurt you among the free market. Without a state, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to hoard resources.

Violates the natural law. Locke wrote in the *Second Treatise of Government* (1689) that, “the chief matter of property being now not the fruits of the earth, and the beasts that subsist on it, but the earth itself; as that which takes in and carries with it all the rest; I think it is plain, that property in that too is acquired as the former.” He goes on to define property in the capitalist vein, “[a]s much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property.”

Capitalism defines property as the fruits of man's own labors. If uncultivated land isn't of man's labors, then said land is inherently common property. But when one cultivates it for homesteading, grazing, etc., it is private property. But it's only private in that it's being utilized. If the law is to protect life, liberty, and property; then the law must seek security and justice from theft of all names - including violence to steal land and force it to be private or common.

The labor theory of value is supported by many socialists, but also by many capitalists, like Adam Smith in his famous *Wealth of Nations* (1776), for example. Frederic Bastiat opined in *Economic Harmonies* (1850) that the concept of common property in land doesn't negate private property elsewhere.

Some anarchists attempt to synthesize the warring anarchist schools, especially in land ownership. To counter violent revolution, Samuel Edward Konkin, III, founded agorism. Instead of taking over the state, workers could compete against it. To counter the land ownership feuds, Fred Foldvary coined "geo-anarchism," a stateless alternative to geoism (see: *Progress and Poverty* (1879) by Henry George and *Public Goods and Private Communities* (1994) by Fred Foldvary).

One thing is for sure, if anarchists with adjectives can't learn to practice what they preach and lead by example, anarchism will never be taken seriously. If anarchism were to happen, then societies would choose what economic systems worked for them. Some might choose capitalism, some might choose socialism, some might choose geoism, etc. In a free society people have the right to choose how to preserve their life, liberty, and property. By believing one's system ought to be forced, one is not exactly anarchist.

In the immortal words of Murray Rothbard in *For a New Liberty* (1973), "If a man has the right to self-ownership, to the control of his life, then in the real world he must also have the right to sustain his life by grappling with and transforming resources; he must be able to own the ground and the resources on which he stands and which he must use. In short, to sustain his 'human right.'"

- Kenny Kelly