



Agrarian Justice (Thomas Paine Classics)

Thomas Paine

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Agrarian Justice by Thomas Paine Complete Edition Agrarian Justice is the title of a pamphlet written by Thomas Paine and published in 1797, which advocated the use of an estate tax and a tax on land values to fund a universal old-age and disability pension, as well as a fixed sum to be paid to all citizens on reaching maturity. It was written in the winter of 1795–96, but remained unpublished for a year, Paine being undecided whether or not it would be best to wait until the end of the ongoing war with France before publishing. However, having read a sermon by Richard Watson, the Bishop of Llandaff, which discussed the "Wisdom ... of God, in having made both Rich and Poor", he felt the need to publish, under the argument that "rich" and "poor" were arbitrary divisions, not divinely created ones. In response to the private sale of royal (or common) lands, Paine proposed a detailed plan to tax property owners to pay for the needs of the poor, which could be considered as the precursor of the modern idea of citizen's income or basic income. The money would be raised by taxing all direct inheritances at 10%, and "indirect" inheritances – those not going to close relations – at a somewhat higher rate; this would, he estimated, raise around £5,700,000 per year in England. Around two-thirds of the fund would be spent on pension payments of £10 per year to every person over the age of fifty, which Paine had taken as his average adult life expectancy, with most of the remainder allocated to making fixed payments of £15 to every man and woman on reaching the age of twenty-one, legal majority. The small remainder would then be able to be used for paying pensions to "the lame and blind". For context, the average weekly wage of an agricultural labourer was around 9 shillings, which would mean an annual income of about £23 for an able-bodied man working throughout the year. Additionally, "a one-time stipend of 15 pounds sterling would be paid to each citizen upon attaining age 21, to give them a start in life."

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