

THE TRIAL OF CHAKA DLAMINI

Review by Pat Aller

A work of fiction which every student of Henry George should read is *The Trial of Chaka Dlamini*, by Stephen Meintjes and Michael Jaques, published in 1990.

In witty dialogue and a lively plot, Chaka, a wise South African, answers charges by fellow blacks that his ideas on reform are reactionary. As the friendly "trial" moves from the homes of radical university students to village shebeens (bars) where his audience includes professional and self-employed blacks, to meeting with white Britons and Afrikaners, the critique against Chaka begins to include socialism.

Like Socrates, Chaka turns the tables on his friends, getting them to question their own premises and leading them to the logic of land value taxation. Economics in this book, however, is always related to ethics and history, with vivid examples. The authors are especially good in pointing out the many social and economic ills caused by present tax practices.

The book is didactic but the approach is not. Characters, though briefly sketched, are unique and warm, with arguments reflecting their backgrounds and personalities. Chaka, a richly imagined figure, does not have all the answers.

The value of this work for Georgists, in addition to its being fun to read, is that it sets up many arguments against the land value tax and rebuts most of them very well. Has your advocacy of Georgist theory ever been stumped by objections based on practical reasons or examples? This book abounds in them, in today's words, today's logic, addressed to today's haves and have-nots.

The Trial of Chaka Dlamini is a rarity in Georgist and other economic literature, because it is fiction. Even then it is unusual, for it is almost a play, almost all dialogue. It should attract many who would not approach economics otherwise. Georgist groups may also find it entertaining and instructive to read aloud, perhaps evaluating the arguments after each chapter. It could also be staged for the public, though some tough stretches may need compression or other adaptation.

While this book's setting is South Africa, the logic is universal. Chaka has won high praise from journalists and reformers in South Africa. This is a book to own and to give.