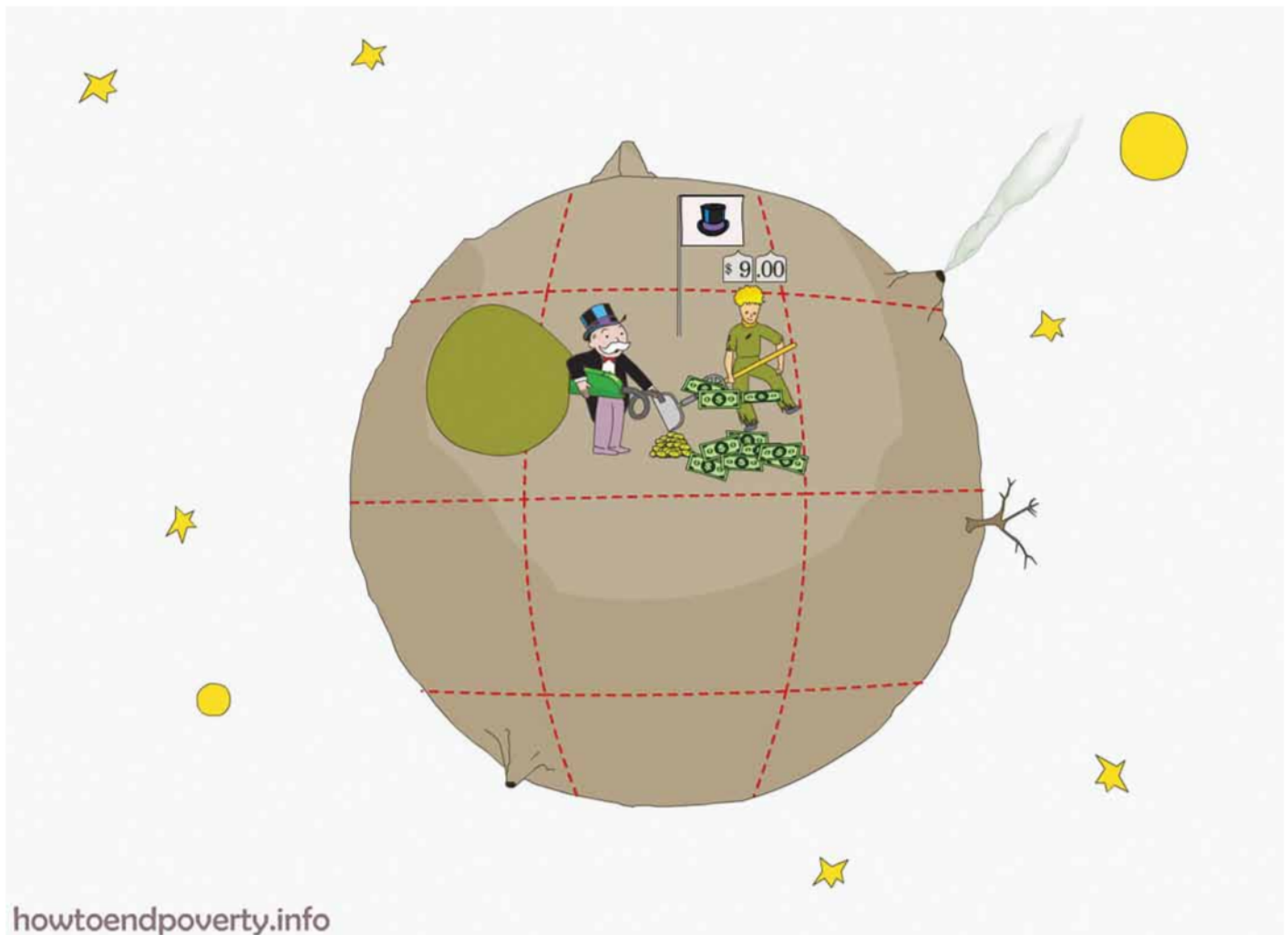


LET'S GO VIRAL!



In a white, star laden universe appears an empty and barren planet. Uninhabited it is not. On its pitiless and stony surface stands a fair-haired individual in green overalls digging tirelessly in the cruel, infertile soil. In comes a hefty man complete with top hat and a bushy, white moustache. The hefty man is flying a biplane.

This is not a summary of the lyrics from an obscure, long-forgotten Bob Dylan song. Nor has life in London with its plenty supply of mind-expanding substances swallowed yet another poor soul in the form of the writer of this article. Actually, we are dealing with issues such as monopolies, pressure on earnings, poverty and economic rent here.

Confused? Well, you shouldn't be. You have simply been introduced to the mind of a young American, Jacob Schwartz-Lucas. Or to be more precise: You've been introduced to the product of that mind. In this case a video animation readily

available on all the new media platforms: YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and later on That-Next-Big-Internet-Thing-Being-Invented-As-I'm-Typing-This.

What I am describing is an internet visualization of the very causes of poverty and the negative externalities of property speculation. Indeed a serious and gloomy subject matter. Yet the animation has the instant adorability and the adolescent naivety of your favourite Antoine de Saint-Exupéry illustration. I almost feel confused as to whether I'm actually watching a children's infomercial about the importance of brushing my teeth.

The before-mentioned American responsible for this apparent child's play agrees to talk to me about the video and other things via Skype. So in the spirit of new media Land&Liberty does its first transatlantic video interview with 24-year-old Jacob Schwartz-Lucas.

“
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”
It needs to be visual

Jacob, I know from our previous talks that you made this video not long after finding an interest in economics, explain to me how the animation came about.

“A little over a year ago I was introduced to the idea of land value taxation. In fact I essentially learned about it via Facebook, which you might say is interesting in itself. I was searching for the most efficient way to alleviate poverty. However, I also had a few time constraints as a molecular biology master’s student. So I wasn’t keen on delving into long academic economics texts on something being referred to as the Law of Rent and similar theories, perspicuous and actionable explanations had to exist. At that time, I wish there had been some simple and concise visual explanations to expedite my grasp of the land value taxation argument, which seemed quite straightforward and logical.”

What made you finally take such a strong interest in the subject?

“Indeed, after finally being able to take the time to research the theory behind economic rent and land value taxation on my own, I have cultivated an immense interest in the subject. You might say that my endurance for hearing the land value taxation proponents out was much greater than that of your average Joe though. I only stuck it out and took the time to understand the core concepts because I was already passionate about social reform. It also didn’t hurt that I was able to raise my concerns and get my questions answered by LVT proponents via Facebook. But you simply can’t expect people to be innately passionate about economic reform, poverty alleviation and other LVT related issues. That being said, I do sense many more would become interested if they were given concise, entertaining visualizations delineating the full ramifications of land speculation and the practicality of land value tax reform. They shouldn’t be required to have the patience of researching the subject if their questions can be answered quickly and concisely through visualization.”

So you’re simply trying to lower the threshold?

“That’s a major part of it. However, I’m also trying to make the subject matter itself fun and appealing; it’s all part of drawing in a larger audience and sparking discourse. We, as land value tax proponents, are losing potential contributors by clinging to old methods of spreading the message, methods that both set the bar too high for our audience and lack this

entertaining quality I’m talking about. Fifty years ago people were much more likely to sit down and read a book or even, dare I say, solicited mail. However, today the average person is bombarded with information. If we seriously want the LVT argument to have any sort of broad appeal, to make people see past that informational film that has formed, we must be on par with the modern media ethos. It needs to be quick. It needs to be entertaining. It needs to be visual.”

Tell me more about this specific video. Was it expensive to produce? What story are the characters supposed to tell and what do each represent? How has it been received?

“It was done on a fairly modest budget. In many ways it’s simply a fun little re-make of the Savannah story, which people familiar with the book *Progress and Poverty* will recognize. It sheds a light on the true causes of poverty and provides an honest alternative. In the video, the man in green overalls represents an average of all non-landowning wage earners, highest to lowest. The Monopoly man, Monopoly being a game based on an earlier board game called the Landlord’s Game as you know, is essentially a land speculator. So the video is a simplification in a western context where in reality we find a significant overlap of landholders and wage earners, none of which are mutually exclusive. Of course the working of general economics remains the same nonetheless, so I feel the video is apt. It has received thousands of views since we posted it in November of 2011 and as we speak we are working on translating the narration into several different languages.”

Besides the multilingual narration what are your plans moving forward?

“In general I hope I can help bring the land value taxation message across to a wider audience. Not just the intellectuals who subscribe to the idea today. In the near future that hopefully means making more video animations, depending on possible funding. In general LVT proponents must be open to getting the message across to everyone, not just to the select few with an unquenchable thirst for economic theory and a hunger for reform. That involves thinking outside the box. And it shouldn’t end with just animated videos.”

Editor’s note: The animated video has the title “How To End Poverty” and can be found at: www.howtoendpoverty.info