

## COULD IT BE SO SIMPLE?

Here is Henry George in *The Irish Land Question*. "It is necessary only to tax land up to its full value. Do that, and without any talk about dispossessing landlords, without any use of the word "confiscation", without any infringement of the just rights of property, the land would become virtually the people's."

This proposition caused some controversy amongst socialists. Karl Marx was irked. "George ... has the repulsive presumption and arrogance which is displayed by all panacea-mongers without exception". And George Bernard Shaw "The Single Tax levied by Unsocial Democracy is about as possible as watering the streets without wetting them..." These and other similar remarks consigned Henry George's writings to obscurity.

But what are we to think of it now? Is it practical? Is it possible? Well, I, for one, think it is as relevant now as ever it was.

In all his writings, Henry George is so thorough that no stone is left unturned. Step by step he unfurls his argument so that in the end we almost are obliged to agree with his conclusions. And how might we put it into practice? I favour the term "Location Value". This eliminates the confusion between rent due because of the location and rent charged for items of human manufacture such as buildings and improvements. And "location value" immediately prompts the enquiry, "What is it? Who created it? To whom does it belong?"

But do we know how much location value is? I fear not! So we need some practical steps to start with and maybe it will be

exposed as a result. Suppose we take the current value of the site with its buildings etc, deduct any amounts spent on buildings and improvements in the last fifty years, and reduce each amount by 2% for each year that has passed, so that anything spent fifty years ago has no current value. We then divide the result by three, to make sure we get a low figure which can't be regarded as unfair. That value is an estimate of the location value, which can be collected from the landowner as return for the use of the property. The amount collected can be used to reduce other taxes. Which ones? I favour VAT, which hits the poor and lower paid unfairly. We should make it clear that we intend that the whole of location value is to be taken when a market determined value emerges.

To me, the important thing is just to start the process. What do we expect will happen?

The value of land will begin to fall, as its support from the privately appropriated location value diminishes. The result will be an enormous sigh of relief from renters, then, a surge of hope for those aiming to have a house of their own. The housing crisis will become less of a crisis. The real cause of inequality will be reduced by a small amount. The possibility of a fair society will be presented to all as something that can be obtained if we keep going. Centuries of wrong can be converted to a vision of hope. Worth going for?

Of course, there remains the small problem of convincing society that this is the way out of our troubles! 🇬🇧