

# the Henry George News

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## A Basic Income for Everyone

THE president of the International Union and of the Henry George School, Joseph S. Thompson of San Francisco, brings to the conference for study the principle that every inhabitant of the U.S. is an equal owner of the nation's land, and the same could be said of every other country.

In a community of free and incentive-stimulated people, charity and doles as correctives of poverty must disappear, and a system must be found that will provide income which would encourage individual independence and freedom. Present attempts to achieve this will be inadequate and futile as they have been in the past. Logically we are all owners of our common wealth. Since we share responsibility for our country, and men can be conscripted to die for it, all should participate in a basic income from ownership of the land.

This common wealth, or natural heritage, consists of air, land, water, minerals and subterranean deposits such as coal and oil, plants of forest and field, and all non-domestic animals.

Everyone can reasonably be considered a stockholder entitled at birth or on certification of permanent residence, to one share in the United States of America. This would not be transferable or subject to lien, and would be annulled at death. The corporation USA should collect in full the income created by the presence of the stockholders and, after paying all expenses of the city, county, state and nation, distribute an equal share of the surplus to each, irrespective of his wealth.

It may be assumed that this individual income would not be large, but it would furnish continuous if meager sustenance for those without ambition or desires. More active and ambitious persons could enter business or professions, availing themselves of all the opportunities offered by useful free enterprise. While there is sometimes a stigma attached to receiving a dole or charity, there is no loss of esteem in the receipt of dividends.

To establish a basic income for all without a drastic revision of our tax structure would be impossible, for if

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### HENRY GEORGE CONFERENCE, NEW YORK, AUGUST 30-SEPTEMBER 5

It is a pleasure to welcome to the 11th conference of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade, and to the 20th annual conference of the Henry George School, the visitors and delegates from many countries who honor us by their presence on this 125th anniversary of the birth of Henry George. The trustees and staff of the Henry George School hope this conference will open broad vistas and remain in the hearts and minds of all a treasured memory.

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we retained income, import, sales, personal property, capital gains, gift and inheritance taxes, all of which are arbitrary seizures, there would be heated and hopeless controversy. But the distribution of our national heritage, income from our common property, would be a different thing from the welfare programs paid by current methods of taxation. Taxation could in fact be abolished and replaced by collection of the wealth created by the presence of the public — the only acceptable basis for society's income.

The government, in collecting rent would be in the same position as present-day landlords. The source of its revenue would call for a minimum of management, and could be neither increased or diminished by competence or the lack of it. A landlord can be an idiot or a dotard, yet his income will not be affected.

The public collection of the land rentals as the only proper channel for the distribution of our common wealth and the only proper source of government revenue, rests on unassailable logic and justice. No "economist" has succeeded in formulating an argument to refute the fact that land value is people value—a value created solely by the presence of people and the only value so created. Manifestly it is proper that all of it should be collected by representatives of the people to meet the common needs.

To the objection that this would mean nationalization of the land, we can say land would be no more nation-

alized than it is today, for by the simple process of failing to pay taxes one discovers that the land "reverts" to the public. Since rental paid for a home or business site is payment to the rest of society for use of the public domain, land value taxation would be spread among the people just as it is now, only more fully.

But isn't it socialistic? The socialists have never advocated or adopted it. Communistic? Quite the contrary. Free useful enterprise would be vigorously stimulated and capital, in industry and service, would be encouraged and rewarded.

Realizing that it has been long and clearly demonstrated that government has no place in business, and that the socialist's placing of the "tools of production" in the hands of the workers would result in dismal failure and breakdown, as it has in communist countries, we are impelled to regard as very wise, the statement of Sir Daniel Hall: "If the state does not assume its proper function as a landlord, it will more and more assume its improper function as an industrialist."

Even if it were found that the wealth thus contributed by nature was not sufficient to maintain our country and produce income dividends for the stockholders, at least the collection of this public revenue would reduce the tax burden of those who contribute usefully to the country's welfare and also reduce the costs of living and of home building. This will reduce poverty. In fact, we will have abolished poverty when we have arranged that *all* participate in our common heritage.