

The Rent of Land Belongs to the People

THIS is the slogan of the Single Tax Party. It is rapidly coming to be that of the entire Single Tax movement. It is the animating thought of "Progress and Poverty." It describes what Single Taxers aim at, and it points to the method of its accomplishment, for if the rent of land belongs to the people it follows that the method of getting the rent of land to the people to whom it belongs is by the taxing machinery of government.

There has been entirely too much emphasis laid on the advantages to be derived from partial or even total exemption from taxation of houses and other improvements; there has been too little emphasis laid upon the results that will flow from taking rent in taxation.

For lighter taxes on improvements mean higher land values. The experience of cities where buildings have been exempted from taxation has demonstrated how limited is the distribution of such benefits. In many cases such exemption has actually resulted in increased tribute to the landlords. Higher prices for land have almost everywhere followed exemptions. It is probably true that a continued process of exemptions will finally reach a point where land will be cheapened and made more easy of access by reason of the increased tax on land values made necessary by the deficit caused by the abolition of other taxes. But the point where this will occur is uncertain, and in the meantime, and for a long period during the process of exemptions, the landlords reap an increasing harvest.

It may be desirable to point out the impolicy, hardships and absurdities of our taxing system. It may be desirable to indicate the advantages of the Single Tax as a substitute for other taxes. Its fiscal advantages are not the least of its recommendations.

MERE FISCAL CHANGES MAKE NO APPEAL TO LABOR

There is little in the fiscal appeal to attract the man who has only his labor to sell. The coldness of the reception which labor as a rule has accorded to our advocacy of the Single Tax is not entirely without reason; the fault is largely our own. Labor cannot be readily interested in a proposition that is presented as a taxing measure. Henry George never preached it in that way, or solely in that way, though he was careful to indicate the method that remained open. But he indicated it only as a method; he never urged the Single Tax as an exemption measure. That was a later and rather curious development of the Single Tax movement. It has led to many peculiar emasculations of the principle by well-meaning groups who have sought for an opportunity to introduce what they termed "the entering wedge."

There is no reason at all to condemn any well meant efforts to advance the principle by easy stages, by gradual steps, if the goal is at all times indicated. Nor should we refuse to support such measures when they arise. But they must have a correct starting point; they must move in the direction of taking all of the ground rent, and as soon as

possible. To advocate exemption measures in the interest of the Single Tax, to present the doctrine piecemeal is to extend the long road that we must travel before we attain the goal. The unfortunate thing is that where Single Taxers devote their efforts to that sort of thing that sort of thing is all they will get—if indeed they get that. Experience tells us all too plainly that where Single Taxers become tax exemptionists and tax reformers their usefulness to the fundamental principle is not increased, but on the contrary is diminished. The cause suffers in consequence.

DEMAND ALL WE ARE ENTITLED TO

We are sometimes told that we are trying to move too quickly—that we should demand only what we can get. The contrary is true. We should demand not what we can get but all we are entitled to—then we shall get more quickly what we can get. Henry George answered these "counsels of timidity" in a notable sentence: "When told that they must beware of moving too quickly, people are not likely to move at all."

THE FULL DEMAND MEANS FASTER LEGISLATIVE STEPS

Labor—and by Labor we now include every man conscious of the fact that he has nothing but his labor to sell—will never be attracted by piecemeal measures. Labor will welcome them only when it understands their real significance. Therefore the importance of making our demands for the full one hundred per cent. of ground rent. If Single Taxers stood everywhere for this principle, without deviation or equivocation, the five or ten per cent. measures that will then come from legislatures whose members are responsive to nothing but one thing, votes, will increase. That they should be responsive to anything else but votes is to misunderstand what constitutes representative government, and the duties of a duly elected member of a legislature in such a government as ours. To quarrel with a legislator for not advancing something on which the people have not expressed themselves, is to ask him to do something entirely contrary to the spirit and intent of representative government.

MAKING A FETISH OF THE SYMBOL

I have said that labor is not likely to be attracted by the method of advocacy which presents the Single Tax as an exemption or tax reform measure. *To do so is to begin at the wrong end.* Exemptions from taxation are merely one of the secondary benefits of the Single Tax; its primary and important benefit is to restore the rent of land to the people and open up the earth. The Single Tax is primarily a land question and not a tax question at all. Its essential principle is that the land belongs to the people, or as many would prefer to say, the rent of land

belongs to the people. Just as it is the besetting sin of many devotees of religious denominations to elevate the symbol to the importance occupied of right only by the truth for which the symbol stands, so, in the same way, the Single Tax has become a fetish that leads us temporarily to forget what our philosophy stands for—its real purpose and its tremendous implications.

THE REAL PURPOSE OF THE SINGLE TAX IS TO OPEN THE EARTH

Labor stands at the door of mine and factory. It knocks entreatingly at the reservoir of the earth where is stored the natural wealth of the world. The door is now closed and barred against labor. The Single Tax is the method that will open it. In towns and cities an increasing tribute is being poured into the laps of the landowners. The Single Tax will turn back this stream of wealth to the people to whom it belongs. It will give to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's and to Smith the things that are Smith's, for it will ask of him nothing but the greater share of production which is his by reason of the use of the more valuable land—that difference which gives for a like application of labor and capital the addition of a bushel or more here, a ton or more of coal there—the difference in the volume of production due to the difference of location which we call land rent, and which if it does not go to the State must go to the landlord.

NO LACK OF LAND ANYWHERE

There are miles and miles of vacant land. There are millions of idle men. The Single Tax will force this land into use—it will tickle these idle acres until they laugh with harvests. They can be forced into use only by the belief of the owners that the value which will come to them—the "people value," as land value or land rent has been termed—will not go into private pockets but into the common treasury. This will destroy the only incentive that encourages the holding of land out of use. It will furnish employment to every man willing to work, and it will establish an era of industrial peace. JOSEPH DANA MILLER

Tax Them Out

WHY are rents high? Because much of the land is held out of use. The law of supply and demand, about which the wise men prate when complaint of low wages is made, seems to be forgotten when the housing problem is being considered.

Yet it is everywhere—this law of supply and demand. It does apply to land and houses just as much as to other things. Create an artificial scarcity of land in a community and you have reduced the supply and increased the demand for houses. Up goes the rent that you must pay.

Now you cannot increase the natural supply of land, since no one can add an inch to the surface of the earth. But you can reduce or increase the market supply of land. We are reducing it now by leaving land rent in private

hands. This is an encouragement to hold land out of use. A vacant lot benefits no one—it is a detriment to the community.

Every vacant lot commanding a market price that is withdrawn from use is one more contribution to the condition that makes for higher rents. It makes one less opportunity for a home, perhaps one more homeless family. Is that a desirable condition for a community to maintain? Is it good policy to maintain a condition in which the supply of land is made artificially scarce?

What is the remedy? It is very simple. Tax them out. The cure is at hand. It lies in the taxing power. The dogs in the manger who will not use nor let others use the idle city lots, the unploughed acres, the unopened mines, must be made to understand by the only argument that they will recognize—the imposition of a greater penalty for holding these lands idle—that the condition that is maintained for their benefit is at last at an end.

Tax them out!

A POINTER FOR THE WORKER

Let the man who works consider this: if those who do not work get wealth for which they give nothing in return the worker must get less wages. There is a certain sum of wealth produced annually; if this were divided into two parts, wages and interest, the worker would have no just ground for complaint. Interest—real interest, not the spurious kind, nor the usurious rates squeezed out of the necessity of those who are poverty-stricken—is what people pay for borrowed money in order to secure those forms of wealth the immediate enjoyment of which seems more desirable than to work and wait to buy them some time in the future. When wealth is made more plentiful, wages permanently higher, and individual possessions increased, as they would be with natural opportunities thrown open to use, payment for the use of money would soon decline. Some have held that it would disappear altogether under the Single Tax, but we may leave this conjecture for the present.

The point to be emphasized is that the wealth produced is not divided in this way; there is another portion of the product that goes to neither labor nor capital that is called rent—not house rent, but land rent, a payment concealed in the rent of the building, and of which the payer is for the most part unconscious.

That this payment of land rent is a steady drain on the product of industry, reducing the return going to labor and superintendance, is something that every man who works for his living should know. When more know it the day of deliverance is at hand.

LORD ALLENBY declares "Egypt is prospering," for "ordinary cotton-growing land sells at \$3,500 an acre."

—H. M. H., in *Cleveland Citizen*.

MR. ZANGERLE'S 175,000 tax blanks will wreck more morals in a week than churches can straighten out in 10 years.—H. M. H., in *Cleveland Citizen*.