

Single Tax In Fashion

THE STORY OF NEW WESTMINSTER,
BRITISH COLUMBIA

RADIO TALK BY JOHN LAWRENCE MONROE

AS a solution to the problems of unemployment and business depression it has been urged over this radio station that labor and industry be relieved of the taxes which now are placed on people who build houses, buy radios, run automobiles and in other ways promote business and useful employment.

In place of the taxes which now retard production and hamper exchange it has been proposed over this station that all taxes be concentrated on the community-created value of the land to such an extent as to make it impossible to withhold land sites from the use of the manufacturer, the merchant, the farmer, and the home-seeker.

I have just come from a city in British Columbia that eighteen years ago inaugurated this policy of entirely exempting houses, machinery, personal property, stocks-in-trade and other products of labor from municipal taxation, and which has concentrated its tax levy exclusively on the value of the land irrespective of improvements.

The practise of placing the taxes on the value of the land and abolishing taxes on labor products has had the effect in this city of killing vacant land speculation, of cheapening the price of land, of encouraging manufacturing and home ownership.

As a result this city of New Westminster, ten miles south of Vancouver in western Canada, at the mouth of the Fraser river, has doubled its population in the last ten years without an orgy of land speculation where many of the cities in the northwest with monopolized land and tax-burdened industry have barely held their own. This city now boasts the largest percentage of individually owned, unmortgaged homes of any city in the United States or Canada. It now has the largest invested capital per person of any city in the Dominion of Canada, and this capital investment is not in inflated speculative land prices but in factories, machinery, stores, and goods. Population and industry have boomed but land speculation has been buried.

Interviewing some twenty-five representative citizens of New Westminster I found street car conductors, postmen, mill workers, real estate operators, public officials, and industrial leaders joining as one in their praise of the system of taxation that makes land sites cheap and which does not penalize the person or persons who improve the land.

The workmen told me of their homes on large sized quarter acre lots convenient to the center of the city, to schools and parks, and with police and fire protection which they had purchased and could purchase again now for \$40 or \$50. Here the same lots in towns one-tenth the population of New Westminster would sell for ten times

as much. They told me they had put their savings into their houses and furnishings instead of into the high price of land. They pointed out how this meant more business for the lumberman, the paint dealer, the furniture house, and every business in which men might employ themselves in useful service.

Likewise I saw here a city where the merchant and the manufacturer do not have to jump over a land speculator to get into business. The land speculator is eliminated together with the incubus of taxation upon improvements. The mayor of the city told me that his community was less affected than most cities by the unemployment crisis and business slump by reason of these facts: the manufacturers and merchants do not have to carry in their overhead expenses the dead weight of a big investment in high priced land nor do they have to carry taxes on their buildings, machinery, and other equipment. Hence the factories and stores of New Westminster are able to keep operating at a time when the same factories and stores in other cities would be closing down partially or completely.

Showing me a large detailed map of the city, the mayor pointed to the vacant lots that were indicated on the map as being on the tax books. The people of New Westminster, I learned, are no more interested in having the vacant lots in the hands of land speculators than the owners of an office building in having their vacant offices in the hands of office speculators. The people of New Westminster would no more wish to boast of the high price of land than a grocer would of the high price of eggs.

With the vacant land for the most part in the hands of the people instead of in the hands of the land speculators, certain sites may be reserved for municipal improvements and industrial expansion. Frequently when a prospective industry agrees to employ a certain number of men every year for say twenty years, and invests a specified amount of capital over the same period of time, giving preference to local workers and local industries, a three-fifths vote of the people grants a fixed assessment on the company's land in addition to the regular exemption of improvements from taxation. Hence, instead of scare-crow land speculator's signs driving prospective business men and home owners away from the city, every inducement and encouragement are offered them to build and beautify the city. In this way, the mayor explained to me, industrial stabilization, of which we hear so much, and steady employment are assured.

Tax officials told me that New Westminster, with the Single Tax, is one of the soundest cities financially on the continent, with one of the lowest per capita tax figures, and the highest percentage of tax collections. If vacant lots are on the tax books, improved lands and homes are not, and mortgage foreclosures are practically unknown.

The real estate men in New Westminster are home builders and not land gamblers. They will tell you of the houses they are constructing, financing and renting, and ask you if it would not be a foolish thing to add to the cost

of their service by taxing the houses as they are put up. The real estate men are in favor of taxing into the public treasury the community-created land values because this makes land sites cheap, thus making the selling price of homes less and that much easier to sell. Furthermore, the family is encouraged to own its own home since the taxation of land values makes it unnecessary to tax houses, radios and baby buggies.

The director and vice-president of the largest corporation in the city, a twenty-two million dollar company, in answer to the question, "Do you endorse the Single Tax as it is operating in New Westminster?" said:

"Absolutely and unqualifiedly. It's the only fair system of taxation, and what's more, the reason we came to New Westminster was because of its untaxed port, its cheap land, and its exemption of improvements from taxation, all which means more profits for our shareholders and better wages for our workmen. "In addition," he said, "we know that here the wages of our employees would go farther because they could be home-owners—the land being cheap and the improvements untaxed."

So I saw that this Pacific coast city of western Canada was bearing out Henry George's tenets advanced fifty-one years ago that the concentration of taxation upon land values and the abolition of taxes upon labor products would make not only for a normal community development, but for a thoroughly diffused prosperity and a widely felt sense of economic security and economic freedom.

Inspiration to a Great Career

SAMUEL SEABURY, the law student, regarded Henry George as the greatest idealist of the age. He considered George's theory as did George, not a doctrine of Socialism, but rather one of individualism, individual rights in Democracy, rising above party in the interest of principle. He conceived it to mean that to all the people belong the land and the sovereignty of government—not to special groups, but to all the people; and that to labor belongs the product of labor's effort.

"He told me of his visits to Mr. George's home overlooking the harbor at Fort Hamilton, and of the long talks they had together," Mr. Stevenson said. "In the light of Mr. George's explanations, he saw clearly the social injustices which he determined to fight."

Henry George told Samuel Seabury that the need was for men willing to devote their lives and efforts to correcting social evils apparent everywhere a generation ago, even as now; and young Seabury became convinced that the public had not lost its capacity for indignation when confronted with injustice; that it had leaders capable of translating that injustice into language it could understand.—*N. Y. World-Telegram*.

TAXES on land values created by population would be the basis of a much juster and more equitable system of taxation than the present pyramided and overlapping systems of taxes we have.

Editorial, *Los Angeles Record*.

Canberra

A CITY OF LEASEHOLDS

ANSWERING a query of mine Mr. D. S. Burgess, for the Civic Administrator, wrote as follows: "The meaning of the word Canberra is obscure and its origin is uncertain. However, it is considered that it is a corruption of an aboriginal place name applied to that part of the Canberra City area which lies between Canberra Creek on the west and the Mononglo river on the south. The first white settlers of Canberra were stockmen of Lieutenant J. J. Moore, who arrived in the latter half of 1823.

In the letter dated December, 1826, Moore uses the name 'Canburry' as though it were a place name, and at that time there were only a few white men in the district. The first survey of what is now the Canberra City area was made by Surveyor Dixon in 1829, and it is considered that all the names used on his map are native names, with the exception of 'Ainsley'. In the early days the name was spelt with many variations of the middle and final vowels. The name Canberrá is first found in official documents about 1857. The official pronunciation was definitely settled on the 12th March, 1913, when Lady Denman (wife of the then Governor-General) was authorised to announce the name of the future capital city. Lady Denman, in a clear voice, accentuating the word on the first syllable and cutting the second syllable short as though it were 'bra', said: 'I name the capital of Australia 'Canberra'. "I am further indebted to Mr. Burgess for the pamphlets and papers containing a good deal of the information which I have summarised in the present article.

THREE IMPORTANT FEATURES

There are three features which every capital should possess, namely, a good water supply, a fine climate, and beautiful scenery. Canberra has all three. The Cotter river, with a catchment area of 170 square miles, provides abundant water supply for the city and is likely to meet all requirements for many years to come, while the Murrumbidgee flows through the territory receiving as tributaries a number of streams which are available if necessary as sources of water supply. Moreover, the Mononglo flows through the site in a westerly direction, and is the most picturesque feature of the scenery, while at Queanbeyan, a well known town about seven miles from the capital, it is joined by the river of that name. The average rainfall is about 25.5 inches, or about that of Melbourne and London.

You cannot get a perfect climate all the year round wherever you go, but Canberra seems to have one as near it as you will find anywhere. The scenery is extremely picturesque. The city lies in an amphitheatre of hills, two of which are over 6,000 feet high, while a third is over 5,000 feet and a fourth is over 4,500 feet high. This would sound very low in the United States, but in Australia the very highest mountain is only a little over 7,000 feet high.