

UGHT SINGLE TAXERS TO REVISE
THEIR PHILOSOPHY.

Editor *Single Tax Review*:

The expression, "Single Tax," has come to have two very different meanings, which are used indiscriminately, causing much confusion of thought. Ignore the fact if you will, it nevertheless remains a fact, that because we think in words our concepts are limited by the words we use. Just as surely as the word "protection" has been used to vastly expand the scope of oppression, just so surely does the term *Single Tax* contract the scope of the movement Henry George started.

Before "a new epoch in the struggle for freedom" can be started by any *Single Tax* conference, a somewhat more definite criterion than seems now to exist must be found for determining what is properly included in the definition of *Single Tax*, and what doctrines properly qualify, or disqualify, one for being recognized as a *Single Taxer*. Does the abolition of all other forms of taxation save that upon land according to its market price, and increasing that to 90 or 100 per cent., constitute the *Single Tax*? And is a *Single Taxer* one who accepts that doctrine? Or does the *Single Tax* include the solution of the transportation problem? or the interest question? or the money question?

In the April *SINGLE TAX REVIEW* the editor says: "It is true that Mr. George tried the *Single Tax* by the canons of taxation, because it is in form a tax, though not one in essence." Suppose, now, that a way be found to apply the "essence" in some *other form* than that of a *tax*, so that the real thing would not be a tax either in form or essence; could its advocate be properly recognized as a *Single Taxer*?

In a former issue the editor quoted Henry George as saying, in response to the inquiry whether the *Single Tax* was a social cure-all, "No, but freedom is." Undeniably—the anarchists to the contrary, notwithstanding—the land question is fundamental. But it is logically demonstrable that nothing short of a *balanced* land tenure will settle it. If it is true, as W. L. Ross asserts in the April *REVIEW*, that "the *Single Tax* will combine the advantages of private possession of land with the justice of its common ownership." the *Single Tax* is not the kind of "gateway," (see Bolton Hall's article) Henry George thought it, else he would not have said "Property in land is as indefensible as property in man." It is so absurdly impolitic, so outrageously unjust, so flagrantly subversive of the true right of property, that it can only be instituted by force and maintained by confounding in the popular mind the distinction between property in land and property in things that are the result of labor."

If the *Single Taxers* of today desire "to

make even an equal impress on the rising generation to that which Henry George and his confreres did a quarter of a century ago," they will have to "get together," a little closer in their conceptions and terms, and, looking beyond the "gateway," make *equal freedom* their goal. A conference of the admirers of Henry George which does not recognize by the comprehensiveness of its aim that Henry George lived and died for the cause of real *freedom*—not for any mere form of procedure—might decorate his grave, and then vanish into oblivion; but it could not inspire any movement to fruitful action.

Henry George repeatedly urged his readers not to take his conclusions for granted, but to *think them out for themselves*. Are they honoring his memory by doing so, or are they disgracing it by a sheep-like treading in his path? Has not the time come for all who desire *real freedom* to recognize some all-too-long overlooked facts? One of these is that the disposition of public funds has as vital a bearing on the balancing of the land tenure as has its collection. Just as surely as there is a right way to collect public funds, there is also a right way to disburse them. And as surely as inequity will result from a wrong way of collecting, as surely will inequity result from a wrong way of disbursing those funds.

In his discussion of "value" in "The Science of Political Economy," Henry George pointed the way to a correct understanding of this. Isn't it about time that we drew clearly the line of demarcation between *real rent*—that excess of produce from equal effort, which is *neither more nor less* than the labor of those who produce the highways, which labor is stored in advantaged locations—and that *tribute* which *property* in the privilege of exclusive possession of locations enables appropriators to extort from users? ("The power which the *ownership* of valuable land gives is that of getting human service without giving human service."—Henry George).

If the government, after collecting its revenue by means of a *Single Tax* on land at its market price, should distribute the fund to the same parties who now obtain it, and in the same proportion, would that settle the land question? Would giving the fund to another set of persons, in a different proportion, *regardless of its origin*, do more than vary the inequity? Is it not becoming increasingly evident that there must be some definite and clearly distinguished criterion for determining the correct disposition of rent, as well as for determining its equitable collection? How can this be done without first clearly recognizing its source? Are not vague conceptions of the proper use of public funds due to equally vague conceptions of their real origin? So long as we look upon "land values" as "created by the community" in

some mysterious way we have never yet been able to clearly explain, does it not logically follow that we will feel just as uncertain as to the proper disposition "the community" can make of the same? Henry George said: "Land in itself has no value. Value arises only from human labor. It is not until the ownership of land becomes equivalent to the ownership of laborers that any value attaches to it." The labor applied on the highways is stored as the advantages which "attach" to locations. Said Henry George: "When the ownership of land can command labor, or the products of labor, the transaction, though in form it may be an exchange, is in reality an appropriation." This power of appropriation—tribute compelling power—coming from ownership of the privilege of exclusive possession (for, as a matter of fact, the land itself cannot be owned), must be utterly wiped out before equal freedom can exist. This tribute compelling power constitutes "land values." But rent—which is an entirely different thing—consists solely of the labor stored in advantaged locations by maintenance of common ways; and if it was used exclusively to compensate that labor, the advantages of exclusive possession of locations would be equalized; the privileges of such possession would be BALANCED, and cease to be treated as property (because drained of that power which is "equivalent to the ownership of laborers") and no possible nucleus for a tribute compelling power would remain. Those who are too timid to face this question and thoroughly discuss it haven't enough of the spirit of Henry George in them to make any "impress on the rising generation" worth mentioning.

Freedom must be either *equal* or *unequal*. Is it the purpose of those who propose to make "a new start" on the tenth anniversary of the death of Henry George, to "mark the beginning of a new epoch in the struggle for freedom" by a *direct* movement for *equal* freedom? If so, there is but one way open for them, and that is through restoration of the equilibrium of equity by means of a Balanced land tenure. If they have any other purpose, it must inevitably lead to *unequal* freedom.

Henry George once said: "How men vote is something we need not much concern ourselves with." (And it's a pity we don't seem to think so too.) "The important thing is how they think. Now the chief agency in promoting thought is discussion." (Hence the importance of discussing the principles of equity.) "The advocates of a great principle should know no thought of compromise. They should proclaim it in its fulness, and point to its complete attainment as their goal." (This, at least, is what equitists are doing.) Do you suppose that if the professed followers of Henry George had acted in accordance with the above conceptions it would be possible today for

anyone to speak of "the apathy of a great majority of Single Taxers in recent years?"

Those who would prove themselves worthy to honor the anniversary of Henry George's death by an attempt to organize a new movement must show that they are at least as sincere and fearless as he was when he said: "I propose to beg no question, to shrink from no conclusion, but to follow truth wherever it may lead. Upon us is the responsibility of seeking the law, for in the very heart of our civilization today women faint and little children moan." (And that is doubly true today.) "But what the law may prove to be is not our affair. If the conclusions that we reach run counter to our prejudices, let us not flinch; if they challenge institutions that have long been deemed wise and natural, let us not turn back."

Those who can rise to this level will not hesitate to discard a label that all admit to be inadequate and enroll themselves under a name that is inspiring and needs no apology. To all such the equitists hold out "the glad hand."

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REPLY BY A. C. PLEYDELL.

The first charge which Mr. Brokaw brings is that the Single Taxers are deficient in courage because they decline to affix to themselves the label of "equitist," or to pose as spectacular strivers for equal freedom.

Freedom has been sought for in many countries and for many centuries, and yet its most ardent advocates often have failed to agree as to what really constitutes freedom. Herbert Spencer first formulated a working definition, commonly known as the law of equal freedom, which serves to test social adjustments. And yet even those who accept Spencer's definition and law disagree sincerely in regard to its practical application. Henry George applied the doctrine of equal freedom to the use of the earth, and what is known as the Single Tax is the method which Henry George proposed as the one which under modern conditions would best insure equal freedom in the use of the earth. Those who believe with him that the first step is the public appropriation of rent can unite in their efforts to secure this result without surrendering their opinions in regard to other matters. What folly to claim for them and their cause a monopoly of desire for equal freedom, or to demand that before anyone shall work for that taking of rent known as the Single Tax, he shall be in complete accord upon all other questions with everyone else who is working toward that end.

That there are some who believe in the George plan merely as the solution of the