

tains. He scaled height after height, only to see other mountains beyond.

At last he came to a sheer wall of rock and climbed, painfully hewing the steps as he rose, with sweat and groans. At last, gasping for breath, he reached the top, only to find another height in front. But his last words are: "Where I lie down worn out, others will stand young and fresh. By the steps that I have made they will rise; by the stairs that I have built they will mount. They will never know the name of the man that built them; at the clumsy work they will laugh; when the stones roll they will curse me—but they will mount by my steps; they will rise on my stairs; for no man liveth to himself and no man even so much as dieth to himself."

## The Single Tax in Perspective

A PAPER READ BY BENJAMIN W. BURGER, LL. M., AT THE  
HENRY GEORGE CONGRESS, BALTIMORE, OCT. 12, 1931  
(Continued from Nov.-Dec. Number)

**M**OST of us have neither the patience nor the ability to study and master the laws that govern our physical or economic wellbeing. The chief preoccupation of our lives is its continuance. The stern business of making a living is so desperate that few can devote thought to matters of economic law which governs us.

The first qualification the student of economics must possess is a scientific attitude. He must be free from bias and inherited opinions lacking in scientific validity. As Professor Harry Gunnison Brown writes (*Economic Science and the Common Welfare*, page 8):

"The student of economics needs most of all an enthusiasm for science. He must avoid prejudice in his thinking; he must learn to think clearly; he must acquire information of scientific value and use it logically. Finally, he should have a deep concern for the common welfare."

It was Tolstoy who wrote that the Single Tax must first be understood to be accepted.

Aye, there is the rub. The Single Tax must first be understood. It can be understood only by those who are well grounded in economic fundamentals. What are those fundamentals?

First and foremost I place a recognition of the fact that we live upon a planet which has none of the characteristics of private property. The student of economics, in a word, must be carefully orientated or adjusted to his environment. It must be emphasized again and again that all our food, clothing and shelter come from the earth; that we are forever chained to it; that in no manner can we ever get away from it.

It is not without significance that Henry George, after stating the problem he was about to solve, devoted the next forty-two pages of "Progress and Poverty" to the definition and comprehensive explanation of the terms he was going to use.

We who have studied the Single Tax are prone to assume

that our listeners recognize their relationship to the earth as we do. What is so obvious, we believe, as the equal right of every man, woman and child in and to the land on which and from which all must live, and back into which all must go? Here we make our great error.

Have you ever considered that it is the obvious things in life that escape you? I can best illustrate that by a story told me many years ago by a prominent New York lawyer who ran for Governor in that State. He said to me:

"When I was a boy, going to school, I would play a game with another boy. We would take out our geographies and open to the map of Africa or Asia, or any of the five continents. I would say to my friend: 'I am looking at a certain word on that map, see if you could find it.'"

"The second boy, with pencil in hand, would carefully look over the entire map, mention one by one the smallest towns on it, and finally give up in disgust."

It was the big word, Africa, or Asia, or Australia, written across the map which was in the mind of my friend.

So it is in economics. The obvious things are not perceived by the multitude. We, who have studied the Single Tax fifteen or twenty or twenty-five years, see them and assume that our hearers likewise see them. We are in error.

Test out the next non-Single Taxer you meet. Ask him what are the things he considers most important to sustain life. He will mention air, water and food. He will recognize his right to air and water without paying rent to an air lord or a water lord, but he has never given thought to his equal right of access to land, the source of all his food, clothing and shelter.

Ask him what he understands by the term "employment." The chances are about a thousand to one he will fail to perceive that "employment" is nothing more nor less than the use of land.

Here we might take a page from the more advanced religious movements of today, which studiously avoid attacks on the old religions and content themselves simply with presenting their new ideas, leaving it to their listeners to perceive the superiority of the new over the old. Those little palliatives and makeshifts such as state housing, compulsory unemployment insurance, shorter hours, etc., spring from a mind which has failed to grasp fundamental economic principles.

After showing the novitiate his utter dependence upon mother earth, we will then be in a position to discuss with him our third proposition, namely, that all mankind has an equal right to live.

Our fourth proposition, namely, that economic rent is produced collectively, not individually, and therefore belongs to the people collectively, will be more difficult to prove. So distinguished a citizen as ex-President Coolidge fails to comprehend this; otherwise he would not have written as he did of the Wendel family, who accumulated about \$75,000,000 worth of choice New York real estate principally land values:



"It took three generations of thrift, industry and intelligence to accumulate this property."

It does not dawn on most people that land has a value separate and distinct and apart from the improvements in or on it. It is remarkable how many people believe that land has no value unless it is used, and that it is the erection of buildings or other utilization of land that gives land its value.

Our fifth proposition, namely, that the Single Tax is the one and only method to establish the equal right of each individual to his share of the earth, will be more difficult to prove. This proposition, I believe, is the one which most people who sympathize with us fail to grasp.

I hear some of you saying: "We cannot bother to teach fundamental economics to the man in the street. It is too big a task; it will take too long. Moreover, it is not necessary. All you have to do is to teach the leaders, and the people will follow."

This, it seems to me, is a half truth. It is the fact, of course, that no great reform to date in the history of the world has been born in the brain of the disinherited and the unwashed.

We did not abolish chattel slavery at the demand of the slaves; on the contrary, history tells us that many blacks preferred to remain in slavery, and some even fought on the Southern side during our Civil War.

Prohibition was not introduced in answer to the insistent demand of the American people, even though forty-six out of forty-eight States ratified the Eighteenth Amendment. It was a band of religious zealots and hard-headed business men seeking greater production from labor who carried prohibition.

Woman suffrage was not granted at the instigation of the great majority of women. Last year, 11 years after the adoption of the amendment, less than 25% of the women took the trouble to exercise their right of franchise in New York City.

But if it be true that no great reform has ever been introduced at the insistent demand of the oppressed, the converse is also true.

No great reform was ever accomplished, particularly in a democracy such as the United States, unless there was behind it a substantial, influential minority.

The Single Tax, after fifty-two years, is still far from having attracted such a minority. Here is our great work: to get behind our movement a larger, more substantial thinking minority than we have yet converted.

Jefferson recognized the need for creating a thinking citizenship, and was an outstanding advocate of a system of free public schooling, to prepare the future citizens to perform their duties in a democracy. We are beginning to realize today how lamentably we have failed in this task.

This condition, however, is not peculiar to our age. Carlyle, in the Victorian era, recognized it when he wrote:

"England contains forty million inhabitants, mostly fools."

The World War showed the average mental age of 5,000,000 American soldiers to be thirteen years and two months. The mental age of the colored soldier was ten years and two months.

Our tabloids and trashy novels, with their millions of readers; our silly movies, are visible proof, if proof were needed, of the poor mental development of the man in the street. In New York City we have one tabloid which boasts a daily circulation of 1,320,000, although it has been in existence only twelve years. By contrast, the *New York Times*, now thirty-five years under its present management, has been able to attain a daily circulation only one-third as great.

The Nation, the New Republic and other progressive magazines and newspapers can continue only so long as they are subsidized. "Middletown" and "Main Street" are true pictures of the American scene.

I began my address with a reference to the present economic crisis. I examined eleven of the more important cures which had been proposed for its amelioration. I showed with broad strokes of the brush how one and all were ineffective and doomed to failure because one and all ignored cause.

To this audience I need not expatiate on the merits of the Single Tax as the sovereign remedy for our sufferings. You see clearly that the present land system, which permits a small land-owning class to charge rent for the use of the earth, *without giving anything in return*, is the primary wrong from which all other wrongs spring.

"Where some get something for doing nothing, others get nothing for doing something," says our friend Macaulay.

When we state that this burden must be lifted from the backs of labor and capital we are met by the individual who says: "Yes, the Single Tax is good so far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough."

Any man who speaks in this manner simply betrays his own ignorance. If the private appropriation of economic rent is the curse from which we are suffering, its public appropriation must be our cure.

The Single Tax is the only method yet devised by the brain of man whereby publicly created economic rent can become public instead of private property. Any one, then, who claims that the Single Tax is a mere palliative reveals his own ignorance of what ails society economically speaking, or fails to recognize the Single Tax as the sovereign remedy for that ailment.

Although the Single Tax is an ethical reform, and might properly look to the Church for active support, we shall, I believe, get no assistance from that quarter. All history portrays organized religion on the side of those who sought to maintain the status quo.

The Church, and by the Church I mean all organized religion, of whatsoever denomination, is a special benefi-



ciary of the existing system of dishonest taxation. It is itself a large landlord, one of the largest.

I say it is a special beneficiary for the reason that, unlike the ordinary landowner, who at least pays some land rent, the Church is entirely exempt from taxation.

"The taxation of church property," says James F. Morton in his booklet "Exempting the Church," page 84, is demanded "by every consideration of sound public policy, common sense, democracy and justice."

I view the Single Tax primarily as a moral reform to reestablish the equal right of all mankind to their earth. The fiscal advantage of the Single Tax, while not to be ignored, may be discussed before boards of trade, chambers of commerce, legislative bodies and the like, but the appeal to the mass must, I believe, be an emotional one to its inherent sense of justice.

The ballot is the method whereby those who believe in our philosophy may have the opportunity to register their belief. Incidentally, it is also one of the most effective methods whereby our adherents may give expression to the philosophy.

As the Single Tax will require only a change in our taxing machinery, which is subject to regulation by the several State Legislatures, we need concern ourselves only with the election of Senators and Assemblymen.

We should ever remain independent and free from all other political parties. We should come before the electorate steadily with one issue and only one issue:

*"How soon are you going to stop permitting landlords to charge you for staying in this country?"*

If the picture I have painted is a dark one, there is, nevertheless, I believe, hope for a brighter future. The ignorance, the dullness, the stupidity and the indifference of such a large percentage of our fellow citizens indicate, to my mind, that they are sick, physically and mentally. Now the chronically sick person is, as a rule, incapable of grasping progressive ideas. He is generally biased, prejudiced and too absorbed in his own difficulties to give time and thought to an objective movement such as economic reform. He lacks perspective, that is, he is unable "to see life steadily and see it whole." The sick man is lacking also in "awareness," that is, in the ability to look around him and take note of what is wrong. His imagination is impaired and he is incapable of picturing a better world order than the one in which he finds himself.

Within the past twenty years two movements have been born in the United States which, I confidently feel, will improve the coming generations and make easier the task of economic regeneration. Both of these movements are still in their infancies, but seem destined to play a tremendous indirect part in hastening the advent of the rational economic order which we advocate. One is the Health Movement, which has for its objective the creation of a finer and nobler human being, on the physical plane.

The other is the Progressive Educational Movement,

which completely revolutionizes our theory of education and our school system. The youth of the future, I venture to predict, who will come under the influence of these two movements will possess a degree of awareness which has been denied all past generations of mankind.

With a greater awareness will come a greater demand for knowledge of what is the cause of our economic maladjustment, and a greater determination to correct the economic system, regardless of how fundamental be these changes in our economic conceptions.

\* \* \* \* \*

Have you ever stopped to consider how any great reform comes into being? First one or two or three great souls in various parts of the earth get what George called "the ecstatic vision." They see the great wrong to be righted, the great forward step to be made in the march of mankind. They expound their views, but are ignored or ridiculed, save by a handful. They die "unwept, unhonored and unsung."

Their followers grasp the flickering light and painfully carry it on. They expound the new idea more vigorously. They are called fanatics, "lunatic fringe;" in ancient times they were burned at the stake or excommunicated; in modern times they are ignored or ridiculed. Nevertheless, the new idea slowly makes headway. After a while a few so called "respectables" begin to notice it. A few more begin to subscribe to the idea, but seek to temper it with reservations, or qualifications, or limitations. Finally, something occurs in society, something only remotely related to the new idea, that forces society to accept the new reform.

Ever thereafter the powers that be say:

"Why, we always favored this idea."

This too, it seems, will be the story of our movement.

## L. and F. a Credit to Cause

THE premier Single Tax publication of the United States, Brother Joseph Dana Miller's LAND AND FREEDOM, September-October number, is at hand, with a rich table of contents. The editor's "Comment and Reflection," as always, is a special feature. The budget debates in the British Parliament are reviewed by Mervyn J. Stewart. There is a very interesting Australian letter by Percy R. Meggy; and from *Land and Liberty* (to the English movement what LAND AND FREEDOM is to ours) is taken a report of the speech of Chancellor Philip Snowden on the budget, with its provision for land-value taxation and there is much other interesting matter. Included is an "On to Baltimore" article on the approaching Henry George Congress, well calculated to tempt the faithful to attend. No Single Taxer can be other than proud to present a copy of LAND AND FREEDOM to one upon whom he would like to make a favorable impression regarding the Single Tax movement.—*Fairhope Courier*.