
To the Editor of the Henry George News:

With much of Mr. Huie's reply to my nine questions I am in accord; but I would add a few comments. [*See the December News.*]

Second Question: Mr. Huie believes that the tendency to overcrowd land would be lessened under site-value taxation. Even if that were generally so, there would be many exceptions, I believe, unless needlessly intensive or anti-social uses of land were prevented by wisely drawn zoning ordinances.

Fifth Question: This question asks, "What is the best method of taxing timber land, coal land, oil land, etc., to prevent depletion of natural resources on the one hand, and monopoly of profits on the other?"

I would add to Mr. Huie's answers a recommendation for a severance tax. In the case, for example, of timber lands not owned by the state, a high tax rate assessed each year would unwisely discourage the conservation of such lands for crop purposes. But if the tax were adjusted to the value of the annual crop of timber, public needs would tend to be met without foolish depletion of natural resources.

Seventh Question: The intent of this question may not have been clear. As phrased, the question reads: "If, as Henry George says, 'there can be no just title to an exclusive possession of the soil,' does this apply as among cities, states and nations?"

What I meant to infer was: If Henry George and his followers assume that each individual in the world has an equal right to share in the world's economic rent, does this mean that a citizen of Mississippi ought to share in the economic rent of California, and each citizen of India share in the economic rent of the United States? In other words, is the city, the state, the nation, or the world the proper unit for the collection and distribution of economic rent?

But I guess we need not worry about that puzzle until we have made more progress in solving the problem at the municipal level.

Eighth Question: Mr. Huie's reply is very interesting, but it does not seem to answer definitely the question as to whether under some circumstances a tax levied on land values can be passed on by the present owner to the purchaser or tenant. That question I would answer in the affirmative. To the extent that the Sydney Harbor Bridge and other necessary public works increase land values, surely the additional taxes levied for such improvements can be passed on by a present owner to a purchaser who will benefit from the improvements. If that were not so, would not grave injustice be done?

—HAROLD S. BUTTENHEIM
