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(Australian Minister for Labour, 1972-1975)

(Excerpts from a speech given at the opening of the South Australian headquarters of the Henry George League at 9 Rosemont Street, Norwood, on May 13, 1984.)

It was on the 13th day of May 1884, exactly 100 years ago to this very day, that Single Taxers held their first meeting in South Australia. The very fact that we are celebrating the occasion is significant in that it demonstrates the fact that we still live; and while there is life, there is hope. Yes, hope that one day in the future when all other economic theories are exposed for the failures they are, our so-called economists will come to see the enormity of allowing billions of dollars of community-created economic rent to pass into the pockets of those who have been allowed to usurp that which rightfully belongs to the people's governments which in turn must impose oppressive direct and indirect taxes and charges upon the community to make good the losses caused by the misappropriation. I refer, of course, to the practice that permits the economic rent of land to go into the pockets of individuals and corporations.

At one of the early Cabinet Meetings held by the Whitlam Government in 1973, I proposed that the newly-elected Labour Government re-introduce the Commonwealth land tax abolished by the Menzies Conservative Government in 1953. My colleagues were impressed with what I had to say about using that tax to reduce other taxes that weigh so heavily upon the poor. They were impressed also by my argument that the collection of the economic rent of land would reduce the price of land for home builders. Frank Crean promised to have my proposal studied by the Treasury. But I knew then that nothing would come of it!...

I have recognised the correctness of Georgian philosophy from the time I was 13 years of age. I served as Secretary of the Gawler branch of the Henry George League and I spoke from the Single Tax stump at the Botanic Park. I knew, and admired, the great E.J. Craigie who served as Secretary of the Henry George League in this State for more than a generation. And it always brings me a sense of shame when I remember that he lost his seat in the South Australian Parliament when my Party decided to give its preference to his Liberal opponent...

South Australia was the only Australian Colony that did not at any stage rely upon transported convicts for cheap labour. South Australia was able to prove that wage slavery can provide cheaper labour power than any other form of slavery.

The South Australian plan was based upon the theories of E.G. Wakefield, who visualized what he was pleased to call a "free" colony of gentlemen farmers to whom land would be sold for £1 per acre with the proceeds being used to pay the cost of transporting unemployed tradesmen and labourers in sufficient numbers to ensure that the supply of labour would always be in excess of demand... At one stage Wakefield began to doubt the success of his scheme and actually went so far as to suggest that it may become necessary to buy negro slaves. These, he argued, would overcome the problems beginning to emerge through migrants becoming small landowners...

The Wakefield plan did have one saving grace, which in the long term would have given some compensation for its objectionable features. It proposed that the Colony should make the landowners pay the cost of government through a tax on unimproved land values. Wakefield was an admirer of Adam Smith; but he subscribed also to Physiocratic School of philosophy and economics, the main doctrine of which called for a single tax on unimproved land values and a Government that ruled according to the laws and principle of nature. Alas, that portion of the Wakefield plan was rejected by the landed gentry.

Right up to the year 1905, the Federal Platform of the Australian Labour Party called for a flat rate of taxation on the unimproved value of all land; but in that year its Federal Conference changed the Platform by calling for a graduated form of unimproved land values... In 1957, no formal decision was made to delete the commitment to introduce a tax "on the unimproved value of land." It was removed by subterfuge; and this, the fairest and most easily defended form of taxation has been omitted from Labour's Federal Platform ever since.

I am certain that the A.L.P. will once again produce the kind of statesmen who in yesteryears had the intelligence and the integrity to be right.

It gives me great pride and considerable pleasure in now formally declaring these premises open for business in the firm belief that on the 13th day of May in the year 2084, a much larger and a more prosperous audience will applaud the two-hundredth anniversary of that meeting in 1884 which saw the beginning of public support in this State for a school of philosophy and economic thought that will one day make it possible for Christians to truly say, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."