

# "Right for the Right Reasons"

by STEVEN B. CORD

WHILE writing my book *Henry George: Dreamer or Realist?* new thoughts about land value taxation occurred to me. I presented two of them in last month's *Henry George News*, and now I would like to mention three more. For other critical ideas see the book itself.

Georgists often say that land values are community produced. This is uncontested. But we often go on to state that for this reason land values ought to be collected by the government in taxation. This argument has some superficial appeal to the uninitiated, but to me it is not a sound one. Of course we should tax land values, but for different reasons.

Many knowledgeable critics have pointed out that all values are socially created — that an article of wealth has value only if someone is willing to pay something for it. This agrees with George's own theory of value. Such critics say, "To argue that because land values are community produced they should be community owned is to justify the community ownership of all wealth, because the *value* of all wealth is community produced! If Georgists don't want to go this far it must be that their original contention is wrong."

It is hard to refute this argument. Consistency is the essence of logic. If we are going to salvage our "community produced therefore community owned" argument, we will have to give a special definition to "community." We do not mean, I presume, the community demand for a particular piece of land — instead we refer to community action, both government and private, which make that land attractive to others — we refer to schools, roads, fire and police protection, also shopping centers, nice neighbors, etc.

If we draw this fine distinction between community action and community demand our argument becomes logically correct but the rhetorical impact is considerably reduced.

Even the seemingly impressive argument that the landowner performs productive services other than rent collecting (to which at best he is entitled to no more than 3 percent of the total rent, certainly not 100 percent) cannot stand up to cogent critical attack. An absentee owner of corporation stock does no more than clip coupons, so by the same token neither should he be entitled to a return on his investment, yet we have no intentions of maintaining such a thing.

One may say the coupon-clipper is providing much-needed capital to the productive process.

True, but land is also much-needed and yet we do not condone the private collection of the land rent.

"But an absentee stockholder exercises judgment in choosing his investment, takes risks, and exchanges his hard-earned wages for his investment."

Yes, and the same can be said of a landowner. Even a burglar exercises judgment, takes risks and presumably works hard.

There is no easy logical way of defending Book VII, Chapter I of *Progress and Poverty*. Man owns himself before anyone else can exert physical force upon him. Therefore, no other person can rightfully deny an individual his rights to himself. Since every man can say he rightfully owns himself, every man can claim equality in rights. If a person exerts physical force on anyone else, then that person is denying the proven doctrine of equality; and for this reason he ought not to deny the rights of others to themselves.

If a man owns himself, he owns his actions. One type of action is labor. If he owns his labor, he must necessarily own all the fruits of his labor — "as a man belongs to himself, so his labor when put in concrete form belongs to him." Thus the sole justification of private property is labor, and thus wealth should be privately owned —

but not land, unless the owner pays for his privilege by being taxed fully.

Let's be right for the right reasons. We should all have equal rights to the opportunities afforded by nature but those are made available to us only through the ownership of land, hence we should all have equal rights to the ownership of land via LVT.

The following new items may be ordered from The Henry George News, 50 East 69th Street, New York, N. Y. 10021.

**HENRY GEORGE: DREAMER OR REALIST?** By Steven B. Cord, Ph.D. Just published — a book that gathers under one cover criticisms of George by economists and historians from his day to ours, and answers them. The author shows that most critics misunderstood George, but he also shows that land value taxation has more academic support than is generally realized. Publisher's price \$6  
Special HGS price \$5

**TWO ARTICLES FROM RAMPART JOURNAL** ("A Challenge to the Georgists" by Robert LeFevre, and "A Challenge to Libertarians" by Robert Clancy). A conservative-Libertarian criticism of single tax as "socialistic"; and a Georgist reply showing that single tax is part of the philosophy of freedom. 25c

**HOW TO BE A MILLIONAIRE** (a new game for two players) produced by Tom Sherrard — takes up where "Monopoly" left off. Shows what happens when LVT is introduced. Educational and entertaining. Complete set \$2

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**BONUS** — with every \$5 invested in the above literature a choice of: "Biblical Economics," four studies by C. J. Ewing; "Enclaves of Economic Rent," valuable documentary evidence; or "Basic Income," address by Joseph S. Thompson at the 1964 International Conference.

We learn that one of the earliest friends of the Henry George School, Morris J. Goldston, died November 5, 1964. He was a lawyer, one of the first pupils of the school's founder, Oscar H. Geiger, and he later taught classes. Over the mantel in the coffee shop at the Henry George headquarters in New York, hangs a large photograph of Mr. Geiger. This was enlarged from a small photo and is a cherished memento from Mr. Goldston. He also financed the first periodical to issue from the school — a short-lived mimeographed paper called *The Researcher*, which appeared in December 1934. Mr. Goldston was a steady contributor all during his lifetime.

Helen Mouat, for many years secretary to the late Emily E. F. Skeel, died recently in Oregon. Like her employer, Miss Mouat has kindly remembered the Henry George School in her will.

Another friend recently deceased is Paul Winsor, who was a pupil of the late George L. Rusby in New Jersey. When he moved to New England he taught in the Boston HGS and remained active in the movement in many ways.