

## The Best 58 Years of My Life

*President (1939-1949) of the International Union for Land-Value Taxation and Free Trade, Mr. E. J. Craigie was for 37 years the secretary of the Single Tax League of South Australia, and from 1930-1941 a Member of the S.A. House of Assembly. Born in 1871, he left school at the age of eleven. Thereafter, he writes, he received his education in the "University of Hard Knocks." He represented the Australian Henry George movement at the international conferences held in Edinburgh in 1929 and in New York in 1939, and visited Britain in 1954. He is a Vice-President of the Henry George Foundation, Australia, and honorary secretary of the Land Values Rating Central Committee, Adelaide. Now in his eighty-sixth year, Mr. Craigie continues to write and publish pamphlets, address meetings, and engages in public debates.*

IN 1900, when I was 29 years old, I was working at the baking trade. On Sunday evenings I attended meetings of the Working Men's Association in nearby Port Adelaide. I had an interest in socialism, developed from reading Robert Blatchford's *Merrie England and Britain for the British* but neither of these books satisfied me that socialism was a sound, practical doctrine.

One Sunday night Mr. Henry Taylor, the then leading single taxer in South Australia, was billed to speak on The Single Tax. I went along—not because I anticipated hearing anything worthwhile — but mainly for the purpose of hearing my then political idol show Mr. Taylor the fallacies associated with the single tax doctrine.

Mr. Taylor's reply to the criticism of his speech made me realise that my idol had "feet of clay." I decided that night to investigate the single tax doctrine. At the local bookshop the only literature I could obtain was the pamphlet *Thy Kingdom Come* by Henry George. I "saw the cat" after reading this pamphlet and at once commenced to proclaim the truth I had discovered. I got into many arguments I was not able to answer. When this happened I pondered over the statements made by my opponents and when I thought I had the right answer I contacted them again. In this manner I acquired a general knowledge of single tax principles.

In 1904 I returned to my home town, Moonta, and from that year until 1911 contributed to the local newspaper—*The People's Weekly*—one and a half columns of matter each week dealing with political and economic questions from the single tax standpoint.

In 1905 I decided to contest the position of councillor against the sitting councillor, a big-business man in the town. My object in seeking election was to try to secure for Moonta the honour of being the first local government body to adopt land-value rating. Just prior to nomination day, the sitting councillor announced that he would not contest the seat, so I was returned unopposed. A hostile



council refused to grant the request for a rating poll until 1908. The poll was a great success and Moonta became the second town in the State to adopt the principle. Thebarton—a suburb of Adelaide—beat it by one year. Both towns are still successfully operating the system.

In 1911 I resigned from the Moonta Council and accepted appointment as secretary of the Single Tax League, an office I held until 1948 when ill-health forced me to retire.

It is of interest to note that until my appointment as League secretary, all that I had read by Henry George was the penny pamphlet *Thy Kingdom Come*. I subscribed to the journals published by the Victorian and New South Wales Leagues, and occasionally I saw a copy of *LAND & LIBERTY* (then *Land Values*). As secretary it became necessary for me to secure all Henry George's books so that I might know what he had said on the question. His lucid statements regarding the principle for which he gave his life were a wonderful revelation to me.

Soon after I started Sunday afternoon meetings in the Botanic Park. Meetings were held there by many organisations on somewhat similar lines to those held at Marble Arch, London. Other meetings were arranged in rural districts. As I believed that people would be more likely to attend meetings during an election campaign than at other times, I suggested that we should engage in electoral contests. This gave rise to some controversy. It was decided that league funds should not be used for such a purpose, but that special appeals be made to finance such campaigns. The appeals were always very successful.

An election campaign enables a candidate to show that single tax principles are not merely a theory, but have a very practical relationship to the political questions of the day. When addressing rural audiences, the points dealt with are somewhat different from those used in an industrial centre. The land question in its relation to farming plays an important part in the speech. The

way in which land is made available for farming operations by land value taxation (because the speculative withholding of land from use is made unprofitable) has to be stressed. Then there is the tariff. Its injustice is stressed and the audience is shown its effect on the cost of production by increasing the price of farm machinery, fencing wire, galvanised iron, wire netting, timber and other materials used by farmers. A rural meeting needs to be reminded that the primary producer sells the major portion of his produce in the markets of the world, and has to take a competitive price. But for his requirements he is forced to buy at excessive prices in a restricted market. In this way free trade is shown to be an essential part of the single tax policy.

In industrial areas a different approach is necessary. Many workers erroneously assume that primary production is no concern of theirs. Therefore, in the industrial towns it has to be shown that land is the basis of all production, that employment depends upon free access to the land, and that the adoption of a single tax policy by preventing land monopoly, would open new avenues of employment, and ensure higher wages for all producers. Then there is the housing problem. Its solution requires firstly that house sites should be made available to all on equitable terms. When land values are collected for public purposes that object is achieved—land is cheap and plentiful. Removal of tariff taxes on all materials used in home building, and on the food and clothing of home builders, lowers the cost of production, increases the supply of houses and thus effectively deals with the high cost of building and the high rent problem.

Working along such lines we found our arguments were received with great interest, in country and town alike. In this way an election campaign proved of great propaganda value to the single tax movement in South Australia.

Campaigns for House of Assembly seats were undertaken in Yorke Peninsula in 1910, Burra Burra in 1919, the Federal seat of Adelaide in 1913 and 1914, the Federal Senate in 1929, and the Flinders District in 1924, 1927, 1930, 1933, 1938 and 1941. Although we knew there was little hope of success—apart from in the Flinders elections—the contests were fully justified by their propaganda value.

In 1924 we set out to win Flinders from the political parties. Weekly letters were sent to the three newspapers in that district and other educational work was done. The electors showed their appreciation of our effort by placing me at the bottom of the poll. Another attempt was made in 1927, and although still bottom of the poll, my vote was 50 per cent higher than in 1924.

Many diehards in the district thought the adoption of a land-value taxation policy meant we would take their farms from them, and that farmers would have to pay *ALL THE TAXES*. To counter this fallacy I spent six weeks going through the assessment books in the State Land Tax Office, and presented the result of that research in a leaflet circulated throughout the Flinders District.

Here is what we showed them :

Area	Assessments	Land Tax
<i>DISTRICT OF FLINDERS alienated farm land:</i>		
10,381,980 acres	£2,920,180	£6,083 14s. 3d.

*CITY OF ADELAIDE:*

1,042 acres	£8,531,054	£17,373 0s. 0d.
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*Land Tax in the city was almost three times as much as that paid on Flinders farm land nearly a thousand times greater in area !*

Other comparisons were made, the final one being between the Hundred of Yarangacka, the richest farm land in the Flinders District, and two corner acres in the main shopping centre of Adelaide. The figures were :

Area	Assessments	Land Tax
100 of Yarangacka:		
72,960 acres	£153,772	£320 7s. 2d.
Adelaide Acre No. 56:		
1 acre	£155,558	£324 1s. 7d.
Adelaide Acre No. 79:		
1 acre	£179,888	£374 15s. 4d.

These diehards then saw that one acre in Adelaide's business centre paid more in land tax than was paid by the richest hundred of farm land in the Flinders District. These were official figures that could not be disputed. They were such a revelation that many of our opponents were converted into supporters.

For the first time farmers in the district realised that they did not possess all the land values in the State. They saw how they would gain if land values were collected for public purposes and the many taxes pressing upon their industry were removed. Therefore it was not surprising that at the 1930 election I was returned at the top of the poll, and occupied that position on the poll for eleven years.

In 1941 the Liberal and Labour party leaders, realising they had no answer to our policy, entered into an unholy alliance to see I did not go back to Parliament. In the Flinders District alone out of the thirty-nine districts in the State, the parties agreed to exchange their second preference votes. I topped the poll as usual on the first preference votes but as the Labour party gave its second vote to the Liberals, a Liberal was elected and I was defeated by this disgraceful coalition of two alleged opposing parties. Incidentally it is worth recalling that the Labour Party, in its election material declared that the Liberals were "connected with the octopus corporation that sucked the life blood out of the workers."

During the eleven years I was in Parliament I made many visits to other States giving assistance to candidates in Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania, and did educational work in Western Australia and Queensland.

I have written a number of pamphlets and leaflets dealing with single tax principles and am now mainly concentrating on securing rating polls to change the system of raising revenue for local government from the rates on improvements to unimproved (site) value of land. As secretary of the Land Values Rating Central Committee, I am kept from becoming rusty with age.