

TITLE DEED—WHAT IS IT?

Address Delivered by Judge Frederick N. Dick-
son, of the District Court of Ramsey Co.,
Minn., at the Henry George Birth-
day Dinner at St. Paul,
Sept. 2, 1911.

Is it the object of this inquiry is not to as-
sess the common characteristics of a deed, of
the document itself; but rather to bring to a plain
and accurate view what a deed represents and
stands for. For a title deed is the authenticated
evidence of its holder's ownership in something.
Is it that the deed holder owns? Is it land,
or something else?

It is a popular delusion that when one pro-
cures himself a title deed to land, he becomes
owner of the land described in his deed, and
is then known as a land owner; but, as a mat-
ter of fact, he is not the owner of the land, and
of the nature of things he can never become

owner. When one purchases a watch or a knife, or any
other article of personal property, he acquires the
ownership of that article. It is his absolute
ownership; he may take it with him wherever he
wishes and hold it as his own. But the
land of the earth and cannot be removed, and
the laws remain where God placed it, and for
the land cannot be the subject of private own-
ership in the absolute sense, any more than can
water or air become the subject of private
ownership. The most that may be done with
the land is that the individual is to occupy and enjoy its
use and privileges to the exclusion of other
members of society. And from this it
follows that a title deed is not (like a bill of sale)
evidence of the absolute ownership of land; but
it is an authenticated evidence of the deed
holder's right to occupy and enjoy for his private
use a limited portion of the earth for either
a definite or indefinite period to the exclusion of
other individual members of society.

The question may arise what difference
does it make? Is not this a mere formula of
words without any real difference of meaning?
What substantial difference does it make?

The judgment it makes a deep and funda-
mental difference. He who enjoys the use of
the land he does not own is a tenant, and not an
owner, and every so-called owner of land is a
tenant and not an owner, because he cannot, from
the nature of things, be an absolute owner of land.
If he is so, the inquiry will undoubtedly
be, who is the landlord? From whom does he
hold his right? Of whom is he a tenant? This
is the real gist of this inquiry, for, as I
understand the doctrine of the Singletaxer, it is
a fundamental principle that the land belongs ab-
solutely and ultimately to society—to

all the people—and that the individual land
owner is only a tenant of society and holds all his
rights subject to the paramount rights, require-
ments and necessities of society as such, as op-
posed to the rights and requirements of individ-
uals as such. By this I do not mean that Single-
taxers deny the rights of private and exclusive in-
dividual occupation of land. They do not; they
do not only recognize it, but insist upon it. But
they do insist also that the private holder's rights
are held from society and that the requirements
and necessities of society are paramount to those
of the individual. It seems to me from the na-
ture of things this position must be correct.

This is not a novel view. It is simply a very
obvious fact which it has not been particularly
necessary to emphasize heretofore. It has, how-
ever, been long recognized, and that it is a correct
principle is demonstrated by several of the most
important principles of our law.

Consider, for instance, the law of eminent do-
main. When society, acting through its busi-
ness organization, the state, desires for any pur-
pose of society to recover possession of any por-
tion of its domain, it has the absolute right under
our laws to do so against the objection and protest
of the so-called individual owner, contrary to his
wishes and without his consent. If the state de-
sires any portion of any private holding for a pub-
lic purpose, for a highway, a railroad, a canal, a
public park, a children's playground, or a school
house, it simply takes possession of the land and
ousts the private holder, whether he be willing or
not. True the state compensates him for any pecu-
niary loss he may sustain through being ousted;
but even the amount of such compensation is fixed
by the state through the medium of its courts, and
not by the individual holder.

Now this right can be based upon but one of
two principles. Either that might makes right
(which is an immoral principle and has no place
in any theory of social statics), or upon the more
rational and logical principle that society owns
the land; that the individual occupies it subject
to conditions imposed by society, and that the
needs and requirements of society are paramount
to the rights of the individual; and society may
recover possession of its own land whenever it is
needed for any appropriate social purpose.

It may be said generally then, that a title deed
is the authenticated evidence of one's right to oc-
cupy to the exclusion of the other individual mem-
bers of society a limited portion of the earth,
which right he holds from and as a tenant of so-
ciety, and to which right the requirements and
necessities of society as such are paramount.

It is not part of my province in this discussion
to point out the logical consequence of this prin-
ciple. It is, however, one of the rudiments of the
Singletax principle, that the increment of value

which is added to land solely through the activities of society and not by the effort of the individual owner, belongs to society; that it is wrong and unjust to allow the individual owner to appropriate to himself such increment of value, and that it is right and proper for society to appropriate for the purposes of society such social increment of value, or so much thereof as it needs. Just what the practical application of this principle would mean it is impossible to point out in any brief discussion, but a very casual consideration will convince one that its practical application in many of the great questions which are now before the American people for adjustment would be of tremendous consequence.

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THE UNITED LABOR PARTY.

Recollections, Twenty-five Years Afterwards, of the
Political Party Out of Which Socialism and the
Singletax Came Into American Politics.

Written by Louis F. Post, for
The Public.

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First Part.

In the summer of 1886, Henry George consulted me upon his becoming that year the Labor candidate for Mayor of New York. This was not the Greater New York of his second campaign, but that older and smaller one in which at the time of his first there were hardly more than ten thousand voters above the Harlem River. As we had been intimate friends for five years, there was nothing diplomatic in our interview. He asked his question bluntly, and in replying I did not conceal my lack of confidence in his candidacy.

It was with the authority of experience, too, that I spoke. Regular party organization and third party politics were familiar to me in some of their ramifications, and I had a low opinion of both. The former I rejected for its political corruption, the latter for its political weakness. With a quizzical smile, therefore, I asked my friend how many votes he would be content to get. He hesitated until, with my smile still in action, I interrogatively suggested 10,000. "Oh, no", he replied; "while I wouldn't expect to be elected and don't want to be elected, I do want a vote large enough to dignify the cause I should represent, and 10,000 wouldn't do it. I shouldn't care to run unless I can get 30,000."

It seemed to me about as probable that Henry George would wake up a multi-millionaire the next morning as that he could poll 30,000 votes for Mayor of New York at the next election, and I advised against his becoming a candidate. But I had miscalculated his qualities for popular leadership.

I. The Beginning.

Within a week or two after consulting me, Henry George published a letter which completely changed my view. It was in reply to a communication from James P. Archibald as secretary of a political conference committee of Labor unions.

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The conference Mr. Archibald represented resulted from recent high handed legal proceedings against militant Labor organization.

There had been a strike of waiters at a beer and music restaurant on Fourteenth Street. The strike having proved successful, arbitrators agreed upon terms of settlement, one condition being payment by the restaurant owner of \$1,000 toward the expenses of the strike. This sum was paid to a Labor committee which turned over every penny to the waiters' union and got from it no benefit whatever. Yet members of that committee, three honest and simple German workmen, were convicted of extortion—a high grade of robbery under the New York statutes. Judge George C. Barrett, who presided, had encouraged the verdict of guilty by suggestive mannerisms at the trial, mannerisms for which he was noted among lawyers. They made mere stenographic notes almost useless, without the aid for emphasis and gesture of a phonograph and moving pictures synchronized. Not only did Judge Barrett seem to influence the jury in this case—perhaps it wasn't necessary, the jurors being of the employer type—but he disclosed his class animus further by sentencing those innocent-minded working men to three years at penal servitude in the State prison at Sing Sing.

Intended, no doubt, to make an example calculated to cripple labor unionism in strikes, Judge Barrett's severity had an opposite effect. It drove labor unions organically and indignantly into politics. Not with immediate results, to be sure, beyond the scare it gave the "superior classes," but with an effect in favor of unionism which still survives and has ever since strengthened with the years. Outraged and angered at this wanton judicial assault by a typical high grade judge—for Judge Barrett was all of that, beyond cavil—the Labor organizations of New York cast about for a defensive policy. It resulted in definite action by the Central Labor Union.

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That body had evolved from a Cooper Union meeting of Labor organizations brought together in January, 1882, by the energy of Robert Blissert, a journeyman tailor, for the purpose of sending encouragement to the Irish on the basis of the "no rent manifesto" which had recently issued from Kilmainham jail. Formed immediately afterward upon recommendation of the "no rent"