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REMARKS OF HENRY GEORGE.

I have listened with pleasure to the brief address of Professor James. So far as I can gather from it, the only thing that keeps him from being a single tax man is the idea that we propose to institute the single tax immediately; for I think he will agree with us that whether economic rent be more or less does not affect the main question. If it be not enough to support present public expenses, we can at least take it as far as it goes, either reducing our expenses to that point or supplying the deficiency in some other way. If it be more, I think he will agree with us that with the growing needs of society there will be no difficulty in finding good use for it.

I wish you gentlemen who oppose the single tax would come together and settle among yourselves what the proper answer to our arguments is. For no one can listen to the objections that have been made without seeing how largely they cancel each other, and I am satisfied that, if you were only to fight it out among yourselves, there would be no objection left for us to meet. But, as I have been asked to reply to the objections that have been made, I will confine myself to a few of the more important. In the first place, to select that which I think lies at the root of nearly, if not all, other objections, let me speak of the matter of compensation.

Professor Seligman, in his address, admitted substantially the principal things for which we contend, but urged mainly this objection: that, to carry out the single tax, it would, as a matter of justice, be necessary to compensate present land-owners, and that having to pay out with one hand, while taking in with the other, would neutralize the benefits. I do not think this quite true. In any growing country I think the land might be bought and compensation made, and still a residual benefit be left, for the future at least. But I do hold that any plan that involves such compensation is utterly impracticable, and that the people, of whom there are many in England, calling themselves land nationalizers, who propose to make the land again the property of the nation by buying it up, are, so far as their direct object is concerned, wasting their time. But we single tax men deny the necessity of compensation. We deny its justice. Nor is it practicable to attach it to our plan. What we are proposing is

taxation. Compensation does not consort with taxation.

We do not propose to take any land without paying the owner for it. We do not propose to take land except where it is needed for special public uses. And, where this is done, we would continue the present practice of compensating the owner for its selling value, as long as it has any selling value. So far from quarrelling with the justice of this, we fully recognize its justice. For to take land from some without compensation while leaving it to others would be making fish of one and fowl of another. But, while we propose to continue the present practice in this respect, we also propose to continue it in another. The present practice is to compensate people from whom property is taken, but it is not to compensate those on whom taxes are laid. I never in all my life heard of the imposition of a tax with accompanying compensation to the people who were ultimately to pay it. If compensation of that sort is just, I have a big bill against this community myself.

But it is not merely that we do not in form propose to take any thing from its owner: it is true in reality. We do not in reality propose to take from any one what he already has, even though he has it unjustly. What we do propose is that we shall *in the future* take for the community the revenue that properly accrues to the community. We do not propose to settle old scores. We do not propose to bring a bill against any one for what has been taken that belongs to the community. We propose to let by-gones be by-gones, and virtually to say, "Keep what you have; but don't do it any more."

People are led into confusion by assuming that we propose to take land from its owners. They are also led into confusion by assuming that the selling or capitalized value of land is something that has already accrued to the owners, — something already in their possession. That this is an error may be readily seen. What gives its selling value to any piece of land? Not what it has yielded to the owner in the past, not even what it is yielding to the owner in the present, but what it is expected to yield the owner in the future. A lot adjoining a railway station on the plains may for some years past have yielded to its owner a rent of \$1,000 a year. It may be yielding at that rate now. But if it be known that on the 1st of January next the railway station is to be moved away, and that the lot would then cease to yield any rent, its selling value would disappear. In spite of what it had yielded, in spite of what it was even now yielding, it would have no selling value at all beyond that of the rent it

would yield till the 1st of January. And this is true in all cases. **The capitalized or selling value of land is determined not by any advantage that its ownership has already yielded or is now yielding, but by the expectation of the advantage that it will yield in the future.**

Confusion arises from thinking of the "unearned increment" as though it were synonymous with selling value. But the unearned increment of wealth that goes to land-owners is a portion of the continuous production of wealth, which we commonly estimate annually. It is, in short, an annual return, its capitalized or selling value being dependent on the expectation of future returns. Now, what the single tax proposes is in the *future* to take for public uses what would otherwise go to land-owners, though unearned by them. We propose to do this as soon as we can, and as fast as we may, by a tax which, even when imposed, can only operate in the future. And we propose to use the proceeds of this tax to supply revenue now yielded by taxes that bear on industry, repress enterprise, and take from individuals what is properly theirs.

What is therefore involved in the claim for compensation? It is not that what has been once given shall not be taken away. It is, that because individuals have in the past been allowed to take for themselves what belonged to the community, they must be allowed to do so in the future, and their successors after them. It is, that one generation having made a mistake in the levying of taxation, all future generations must continue this mistake. It is, that having been robbed all my life by taxes that extorted from me the fruits of my labor, I must submit to the continuance of this robbery for the rest of my days, and that my descendants for all time must submit. Could the men of the past morally bind the men of the present? Can the men of today, by their errors or their profligacy, bind the men that are to come? There have been times when men could legally sell themselves into slavery. Granted, if you please, that where such sale was legal it constituted a moral bond. Did that bond attach to the unborn descendants of the man who thus sold himself? Did it make immoral any effort of theirs to release themselves by the repeal of laws which made such slavery legal? This claim for compensation involves, theoretically, the perpetuation of the same injustice in another form. It involves, practically, the claim that we must continue to act unjustly because we have acted unjustly. The doctrine of the divine right of kings was almost reasonable as compared with so preposterous a doctrine.

In speaking this morning, Professor Seligman said something like this: that, if there was in the present state of society a landless man, he was only landless because he was too poor to buy anything; that the reason that prevented him from buying land was the same reason that prevented him from buying anything else. This is true. But that it is true in the present state of society does not show that it is just. It is in accordance with justice that save by gift no one should have these other things — the things produced from land by labor — without buying them, since for all such things a price must be originally paid. They are in the first place bought from Nature, so to speak, by the exertion necessary to produce them. But it is *not* in accordance with justice that men should not be able to get land without buying it from others, since for the land no original price was paid. Land is the gratuitous gift of Nature to men, — the free bounty of the Creator to his children. Here is a man who, like all of us, has come into the world bringing nothing with him. Imagine him grown and in his full powers. He has as yet done no work and has no proceeds of his own labor with which to buy the proceeds of any one else's labor. But has he no right to go to work without paying some one else for permission? Has he no right to the natural element, indispensable of all work? When a man buys a hat, a house, when he buys grain or cheese, he is giving the produce of labor for the produce of labor. There is an exchange. But, when he is compelled to give to another the produce of his labor for something that existed before labor was, it is not exchange. It is a robbery!

The landless man! Nature knows no such thing as a landless man. She brings no man into being where she has not provided land. The landless man is as much a monstrosity as a waterless fish or an airless bird. We are land animals. What Nature gives us is our own powers and the land. The land is the reservoir from which we must all draw. It is the indispensable element to all exertion, the natural factor in all production. The equal right to live involves the equal right to land. And, in making rights to land equal, what are we doing? Taking from any one what properly belongs to him? Not at all. We are simply securing to each what is properly his. The only power we are taking from any individual is the power of making an unjust appropriation — the power of taking the proceeds of labor without doing labor. What we single tax men are proposing is not confiscation: it is the stoppage of confiscation.

Supposing we could tomorrow appropriate all land values by means of the single tax

and abolish all other taxes, what would be the result? Such an increase of prosperity, such an impetus to business, such a demand for labor and all the products of labor as we have never dreamed of. Every wheel of industry would spring into motion, and there would ensue to the community as a whole a general and enormous gain. Some men might lose relatively, but as members of the community they would share in the absolute gain. Now, as Professor James has well brought out, we do not prohibit invention or restrain industrial improvement because they may relatively injure individuals. Why then should we for this reason forego governmental improvement? There are today inventions talked of as possible that would make existing steamships all but worthless. Who would say that such inventions should be prohibited because of the loss to steamship owners? Why, then, should any one say that an improved method of collecting taxes, which would produce general beneficial results, should be prohibited because of the loss to land-owners?

Mr. ATKINSON. — The landless man has a right to access to land without pay, you say. You, therefore, let him occupy a piece of land without pay, in order that he may get his living out of it; but you make it the condition of the occupancy that out of the proceeds of the work he puts on that land he shall surrender such part of the proceeds of the work as will meet all the taxes, while I, who do not choose to work land, but sit in a chair and work with my brain, pay none of them. You, therefore, put a condition on the landless man which is vastly more onerous than the condition of being obliged to buy a lot and having somebody else share the taxes with him.

Mr. GEORGE. — We do nothing of the kind. We would not tax any one for holding land, but only for holding valuable land; that is, land to which economic rent attaches, because superior to land that others are using. Every man has an equal right to land; but the equality of this right involves the limitation that he has no more right than any one else, consequently no right to any better land than any one else can get. He has a right to get and use, without payment, land to which no economic rent attaches. Such land, under our system, he could get for nothing; for land speculation would be killed. And, in using it, he would have no taxes at all to pay, either on land, on improvements, on produce, or on anything else. But when his land became valuable, — that is, commanded a premium because better than land which others were using, — then he would have to pay a tax. In short, we do not propose to tax land. We propose to tax land values.

The longer you think of it, the more clearly you will see that the change we propose involves no real injury to any one; that even those who lose relatively would be more than compensated by their share in the general gain. And I would like those who are thinking of the single tax as springing on unsuspecting land-owners like a tiger from ambush to know, that much as we single tax men would like to have it go into force tomorrow morning, we realize the certainty that we cannot be gratified. We can only accomplish the change we seek by the slow process of educating men to demand it. In the very nature of things it can only come slowly and step by step. We do not delude ourselves on that point, and never have.

One of the speakers this morning spoke of the injustice of the single tax in taking away from a man who had just bought land the possibility of his getting any "unearned increment" from it. The suggestion is that of a man buying land at present prices, and then by the sudden advent of the single tax finding the value of his purchase utterly gone. But it is only as it arrived, step by step, at or near the point of perfection that the single tax could destroy the possibility of getting any "unearned increment." Then, since every step in the single tax must tend to somewhat reduce the selling value of land, where is the point short of the very last step, when selling values would have shaded down almost to nothing, where the purchaser of land could suddenly lose his whole investment? unless, indeed, he bought on a basis of wild-cat speculation, which the first instalment of the single tax would prick. But, if you can imagine any one so surprised as this supposititious purchaser, would he really deserve sympathy? The single tax can only come by slow advances, and each advance — ay, even the agitation for each advance — gives notice. Already this agitation is going on, and is beginning to assume practical shape. It will go on from one step to another. And, if any man chooses to shut his eyes to what is coming, does he not deserve to lose?

Another question is, Why should land-owners be taxed and capital escape? In an audience like this I need not waste time in exposing the errors of those who mix all sorts of things under the name of capital. Capital, in the true meaning of the term, consists of wealth; that is, of the products of exertion used in production. We would levy no tax on capital, because it is clearly unjust to take from any one the produce of his exertion. Whatever a man brings forth, whatever he adds to the common stock of wealth, belongs to him alone; and it is a wrong to take from him any part of it. If a man builds a house, he ought to have the whole house, not nine-tenths of it. If he

cultivates a field, the whole produce should be his. If he puts up machinery or builds a factory, it is a violation of the right of property to demand, on the part of the State, that he shall share with others what his own exertion has produced. And these rights of the producer pass with his title. Therefore, it is unjust to tax capital.

In the next place, it is inexpedient. We want more capital. We want more wealth in all its forms. This country, as Mr. Atkinson has very well shown, is, after all, a very poor country. So with Great Britain. With all the wealth that is concentrated there, the great mass of the people are underclothed and underhoused, if not underfed. They do not get enough wealth to enable them to lead wholesome lives and to properly develop their powers. Nor would they get enough if wealth were equally divided. We want more wealth, and therefore it is inexpedient to tax wealth in any of its forms. Tax wealth, and you will have less wealth. But, again, you cannot tax the capitalist in taxing capital. It slips off the capitalist and rests on the consumer, falling with the heaviest weight on the poorest people.

Another question sometimes asked is, If you would take the unearned increment of land values, why not take other unearned increments? Well, what are they? I can think of nothing which can be fairly likened to that increased value which attaches to land by the progress of society except that which attaches to franchises. As the village grows into the city, the business of the street railway becomes more profitable. So with gas-works, water, works, etc. So with railways generally. But, if these increased profits are not ultimately resolvable into increased economic rent, they are of the same nature. Such franchises are special privileges, like the privilege of holding valuable land; and the profits due to the general growth ought, as we hold, to be taken for public use or diffused through the community by a reduced price of services. I am inclined to think, as the majority of single tax men think, that the best way would be for the community to perform such services for itself, as by supplying its own gas and its own water and running its own street railways, and, if not operating the larger railways, at least maintaining the roadways.

I do not suppose there is any one here who would hold that the occasional (and even, so far as they may be concerned, accidental) profits that sometimes come to men by fluctuations in the price of products are in the nature of an unearned increment, or that, even if practicable, it would be wise for the community to try to take them; for that would be to discourage the forethought which plays a beneficent

part in equalizing supply. But there are some things to which additional value seems to accrue with the increase of wealth and culture, or even by lapse of time. Thus there are paintings that rise greatly in value long after those who painted them are dead. But this is simply an increase in the reward of the labor of production, going to the owner of the picture or successor to the original right of the painter. And that it goes to him, and not to some other, is in itself the legitimate reward of the taste and sagacity evinced in buying the picture. So a coin, a vase, a book, may become more valuable simply because of their age. But the principle is the same. Such things are in their nature subject to exclusive ownership. And this ownership involves the right to any increase of value that may from any cause attach to them.

Again, there are certain businesses that yield larger profits with the growth of population. The most striking of these, perhaps, is the newspaper. As the village becomes a large city, the local newspaper, instead of making a few hundred dollars a year, may yield a revenue of hundreds of thousands. But the increased profit is conditioned on the ability to publish a paper that will meet the new demands. There is a certain element of monopoly in the newspaper press, due to news combinations and resting largely on the private control of telegraphs. But, in spite of this, there is nothing more striking in the growth of our cities than the way in which newspapers rise and fall, showing how, after all, their success depends on the ability of their conductors.

I know of no business to which anything like an unearned increment attaches. The growth of a town may make a hotel more valuable; but the increased value attaches to the land, just as the value of the publican's license in England goes ultimately to the land-owner. And the general principle, I should say, is this: — that, wherever an increased advantage attaches to a thing properly subject to private ownership, it belongs to the owner; but, where it attaches to that which properly belongs to the community, it should be taken by the community.

The case of bonds, where their selling value rises by the fall of interest, has also been cited; and I am asked to refer to it. A bond is a contract between two parties, one of whom for a valid consideration agrees to pay certain sums periodically and a certain sum finally. Where the contract is between private parties, as in the case of a railway bond, is it not clear that it includes all the contingencies that may affect the selling value of the bond? And is this not also clear, when the contract is between a

government and individuals? The loaner or buyer takes the chances for gain or loss, whether they arise from special or from general causes; and, so long as you propose to respect the contract, they must be left to him. And observe : When the selling value of a bond rises because of a general fall of interest, the relations between the parties are unchanged except that, could the contract be terminated, the one might borrow and the other lend at lower interest. The payments called for are unaffected. The rise in the selling value of the bond is merely a change of ratio between selling and annual value. It does not add to the revenue of the bond-holder; nor, if he sells to invest again, can he increase his revenue.

I know of no such thing as a perpetual bond or a perpetual debt at a fixed rate of interest. With the fall of interest, governments have reduced the interest they pay, either on expiration of the time for which bonds were issued or by more or less compulsory refunding processes. And I may say incidentally that I do not regard the fall of interest proper as a necessary consequence of social progress. So far from the effect of the single tax being, as some think, to reduce the rate of interest, my opinion is that it would increase it. If this be so, the effect upon bonds would be the reverse of that contemplated in the question. Their selling value would decrease instead of increase.

But to go to what may perhaps be the spirit of the question. While it is a matter that I do not care to raise now, — for, just as the land supports us all, so is the reform that would open land to labor the most fundamental of all reforms, — I may frankly avow my belief that there is no justification for public debts. As there never could have lived men who could validly dispose of land for all time, so no generation can validly burden other generations with debt. In the same letter in which he declared it self-evident that land belongs in usufruct to the living and not to the dead, Thomas Jefferson stated this principle, and proposed that all public debts and statutes should be deemed void on the lapse of a period which he thought about the time that one generation passes away and another succeeds. The more this proposition was considered, he said, the more salutary it would seem. And so, in the light of today, I think it will. This power of incurring public debts, of bonding future generations, is the power that maintains monstrous armaments, and is rapidly putting the civilized world in pawn. In the interests of civilization it must be ended, and it will be ended.

Professor Seligman has said that the true principle is, not taxation according to

benefits, but taxation according to ability — meaning, I presume, ability to pay. To us it is as unjust and absurd to charge men with taxation in proportion to their ability to pay as it would be to charge them for postage-stamps in proportion to their ability to pay. If men get rich dishonestly, it is no remedy to tax them more. If they get rich honestly, it is a gross outrage. No one ought to be forced to pay more than another because he is more industrious or more talented, or has more foresight, or any other personal quality. All men ought to be put upon an equality of opportunity, letting whoso can work best and hardest take all the advantage that those qualities give. It is unjust to tax men according to their ability to pay. And it is inexpedient to tax qualities or the earnings of qualities that increase the general stock of wealth. Not merely this, but it is clearly impossible to tax men according to their ability to pay. All over the world it has been tried. Has it ever succeeded? In the United States today we are trying to tax men according to their ability to pay. This is the theory of many of our federal taxes and of nearly all our local taxes. What is the result? The rich man walks from under such taxes. The farmer pays on his tools; he pays on his little stock, on all he has. But the millionaire, — not only does he pay far less of the indirect taxes in proportion to his ability than fall on the sewing-girl and the day laborer, but even of the direct taxes he pays less than men of small means. And the attempt to tax men according to their ability has notoriously led to evasions, perjuries, bribes, corruption, and widespread demoralization.

No: we ought to tax men according to the special advantages they receive from the community, thus putting all men on an equal plane and giving free play to personal qualities. Here is the principle: We are all equally entitled to the use of land; and for the use of land in itself there should be no tax whatever. But where a value attaches to the land itself — that is to say, where land is so much better than the ordinary that it commands a premium — there a special privilege is accorded the holder. He receives from social growth and improvement a special advantage; and in the tax we propose we would simply take the value of that special advantage for the whole community, thus putting all upon the same plane.

That this is the true principle is shown by the fact that the tax on land values can be collected with the minimum of cost and the maximum of certainty; that it does not provoke the evasion, fraud, and corruption that are incident to other taxes. Land lies out-of-doors; it cannot be concealed or carried away. And its value can be ascertained with more certainty than any other value.

I said this afternoon that the land-owner as a land-owner was absolutely useless. Perhaps I had better go into that matter a little more fully. If any one thinks that the land-owner as landowner is of any use, it is because he is confounding ownership with possession; and when people talk, as some gentlemen have talked here, of the advantages of the private ownership of land, they are thinking of the advantages of secure possession. Secure possession of land is necessary to the best use of land, but that is not ownership. The reason possession is needed is to give security that the improver shall reap the rewards of his exertion and outlay. But ownership is not necessary to secure improvement. In New York today you will find buildings erected on land owned by other parties, erected on leases, on the security of possession for a certain time. Go into Chicago, and you will find buildings erected in the same way; and there today you will find buildings erected on city land, not on long leases or a fixed rent, but with the contract that at short intervals a revaluation shall be made, and that the rent shall be increased as the land increases in value.

No man ploughs a field to get the rewards of its ownership: he ploughs to get the rewards of industry. No man builds to get the rewards of land-ownership: he builds to get the rewards of building. Perhaps that is a little too sweeping a statement. There are cases in which houses are built and improvements made to get the reward of land-ownership. Go, for instance, to some of those "boom towns" in the West. About Los Angeles you may find great hotels standing empty. Nobody lives in them, and nobody ever has lived in them. They were erected as "bait for suckers" during the boom. In other places you may find railways covered up in mud and streets laid out where people are ploughing. That is the wasteful sort of improvement that is done to get the rewards of land-ownership. The industry that land-ownership stimulates! It is the industry of the "boomer" and "land-shark," the sort of industry expended in getting up the maps of Eden that dazzled Martin Chuzzlewit!

To leave the rewards of mere land-ownership to individuals is not merely *not* to encourage real improvement, it is powerfully to *discourage* it. The American farmer strives, wherever he can, to get more land than he can possibly use profitably, in the hope of gain by the increase in value, and thus compels the next comer to go further on. So around all our cities you may see vacant lots, held at high prices against those who would use them. We have a population so diffused in some parts as to deprive it of advantages and economies that civilization ought to give, so crowded in other

parts that healthy physical or moral life is impossible. The mortgaged homestead, the filthy tenement house, the seeming want of work where men are suffering for want of the things that work produces; the perplexing paradoxes, the threatening problems, presented by what is called the labor question, — these are the fruits of private land-ownership, the results of leaving to individuals that fund which ought to go to supply the needs of the community.

Professor Seligman said that the advocates of the single tax do not understand the science of finance. Well, if some of the reasoning we have heard here be the result of understanding the science of finance, we single tax men are glad that we don't understand it. He has also said that the professors of political economy as a class are against us. Unfortunately, that is true. But is it astonishing? Given a great social wrong that affects the distribution of wealth, and it is in the nature of things that professors of political economy should either belong to or consciously or unconsciously be influenced by the very class who profit by the wrong, and who oppose, therefore, all means for its remedy.

Professor Seligman intimates that we who are not of the colleges ought to accept what professors of political economy tell us of that science, as we accept what professors of the physical sciences tell us of their domain. The difference, which he ignores, is that researches into the physical laws of nature do not affect the "pocket nerve": political economy does. And just as Macaulay has said, — if there were any large pecuniary interests concerned in denying the law of gravitation, that law would not be acknowledged to this day! It certainly would not be in the universities and colleges.

There is a reason why the great majority of us must, in such matters as astronomy or chemistry, accept what the professors of such sciences tell us. We cannot all study such sciences: we have neither the leisure, the knowledge, nor the opportunities. But if we cannot all study political economy, — the science whose phenomena lie about us in our daily lives, and enter into our most important relations, and whose laws lie at the bottom of questions we are called on to settle with our votes, — then democratic republican government is doomed to failure; and, the quicker we surrender ourselves to the government of the rich and learned, the better.

Let me say a direct word to you professors of political economy, you men of light and

leading, who are fighting the single tax with evasions and quibbles and hair-splitting. We single tax men propose something that we believe will make the life of the masses easier, that will end the strife between capital and labor, and solve the darkening social problems of our time. If our remedy will not do, what is your remedy? It will not do to propose little goody-goody palliatives, that hurt no one, help no one, and go nowhere. You must choose between the single tax, with its recognition of the rights of the individual, with its recognition of the province of government, with its recognition of the rights of property, on the one hand, and socialism on the other.

Gentlemen, don't quibble and split hairs about this matter. It is too solemn, too important. It involves the happiness, the health, the lives, the very souls, of human beings. It involves the progress of society, the fate of civilization. If you have had superior education, if you have had what to so many of us has been denied, the leisure for study, the opportunity to cultivate what is highest and best in your powers, the more is it incumbent on you to meet the question frankly and fairly. If you will not accept our remedy, what is your remedy? There must be some deep wrong underlying our organization today. If it is not the wrong we point to, the wrong that disinherits men of their birthright, what is it? There must be some way of securing to the laborer the proper rewards of his toil, of opening to every man willing to work opportunity to work. If you will not take our plan, what is your plan? You see these recurring strikes, you see the destructive contests that they involve, you see larger combinations marshalling for a wider and bitterer war. You must see that no man or body of men can have the moral right to demand that other men shall employ them or shall pay them a certain rate of wages. But is it not also clear that there is a right belonging to every man, a right attested by his very presence in this world, — the right to employ his own labor? If you reject our simple plan for securing that, how do you propose to secure it?

Modern society cannot stand still. All over the civilized world social conditions are becoming intolerable. If you reject the single tax, look to it, from what you turn and toward what you are going. We propose to respect to the full the rights of property. We propose to assure to each man his own, be it much or little. We would remove all restraints on production, all penalties on honest acquisition. We care not how rich any man may become, so long as he does not appropriate what belongs to others. We ask no class legislation, no favors or doles for any set of men. We would do away

with all special privileges, abolish all monopolies, and put all men on the same level with regard to natural opportunities and before the law. We would simplify government, do away with its interferences in private affairs, and strike at the root of political corruption.

What is proposed on the other side? More restrictions, more interferences, more extensions of government into the individual field, more organization of class against class, more bars to the liberty of the citizen. In turning from us, even though it be to milk-and-water socialism, you are turning to the road that leads to revolution and chaos, you are using your influence to intensify the fight in the dark that, as it goes on, must evolve the forces that destroy civilization.