

A Backward Look At Truth

“WHAT the Railroad Will Bring Us,” was the title of an article by Henry George, reproduced in *The American West*, illustrated with photographs of that day, in a backward glance that makes clear the fact that a Georgist look is a forward look. This article published by the Western History Association quoted Henry George: “the truth is, that the completion of the railroad and the consequent great increase of business and population, will not be a benefit to all of us, but . . . only a portion. As a general rule . . . those who have, it will make wealthier; for those who have not, it will make it harder to get . . . Let us not imagine ourselves in a fool’s paradise, where the golden apples drop into our mouths.”

Ten years before the publication of *Progress and Poverty* “the most influential philosopher the West has produced took this dead-aimed shot at California’s uncritical anticipation of the coming of the transcontinental railroad.” His prophetic observation appeared in the *Overland Monthly* in 1886. Today, 99 years later, “his heresies have that mellow ring of truth,” said the western historians.

And in London’s *Land & Liberty* we read that a city planner in Japan is making a similar observation about the new Tokaido rail line, the Meishin Expressway and new bridge and tunnel projects. While these will all transform the country, he said, the investments will not be effective unless the land price issue is faced.

In a magazine article Akira Tamura pointed out three factors that have prevented the establishment of an effective land policy: the legal concept of interference in the land market as an infringement of private property rights, the political pressure exerted by those who gain from the present land price situation, and the lack of study of the land price issue.

Although land for expansion in Japan is relatively scarce there would be no cause for alarm, says Mr. Tamura, if it were not for high land prices. Rises in land prices are mainly attributable to economic advancements which do not require any productive efforts on the part of landowners. Public works have also contributed to the price increases.

His viewpoint is evidently shared by a former Construction Minister of Japan who said “land is not merchandise or a scheme for money making, but the basis for human activities.”

The city planner, Mr. Tamura, suggested as a solution that increases in land values after a certain date be divided among the bodies responsible for producing the increased value — also setting up new land planning techniques and a public real estate market agency.

“Increment taxes may not be a sound approach to true reform,” states the *Land & Liberty* editorial (March), “but Mr. Tamura has highlighted the basic Japanese economic problem—one which could have far reaching effects for this rapidly developing country unless the correct remedy is applied.”

“God if you want me to succeed you better open a few doors.” This was the spirit in which Dr. Irene Hickman reported on the role of the reformer in a seminar held by the Los Angeles extension which was re-broadcast on KPFK-FM. Dr. Hickman was also one of four participants in a TV feature “Can We Afford Honest Assessors” on April 4th, which was called one of television’s best programs on taxation. She will be a speaker at the annual conference of the HGS in Montreal in July.