

most plots of land have, apart from any structure or improvements in or on them. In other words, land value denotes the unimproved value of land itself, as distinguished from any additional value due to the expenditure of labor or capital upon it.

Land values arise from the universal need of mankind to make use of the free gifts of nature—the land and the stores which it contains. They vary according to the natural advantages attaching to different pieces of land, and according to the need and ability of the population to make use of these advantages.

To be more precise: the unimproved value of any plot of land—whether urban or agricultural, whether it has minerals or stone beneath it, or water on it—depends first on the degree of its superiority to the worst land in use, and, secondly, on the numbers, energy and ability of the community.

It is unjust that unimproved value of land, which is created by the community and required for public uses, should be appropriated by private individuals. From this injustice numerous evils flow, which would disappear if taxation were levied according to the unimproved value of the land.

Public revenues have now to be raised by taxes and rates on the processes, products and earnings of industry. The result of such taxation is that industry is hampered, earnings are diminished and the commodities are made scarcer and dearer.

For example, the present local rates, so far as they are levied on the value of buildings, restrict the supply of buildings and increase their cost. Under the present rating system the use of land is taxed; but land, however valuable it may be, if it is not used, is not taxed. The result is that landholders often find it advantageous to withhold land from uses to which it could be put with advantage to the community. The development of fresh districts and the full utilization of the old, which are matters of vital importance to a growing population, are thus delayed and prevented.

In particular, the present rating system, which exempts valuable land from taxation if it is vacant, and imposes heavy burdens on new premises as soon as they are occupied, is the chief cause of the prevalent lack of house-room, with its attendant evils of overcrowding and high rents. In general, while taxation is not levied according to land value, landholders are enabled to set up a kind of land monopoly, which hinders the normal development of the community; the price to be paid for the use of land of all kinds is artificially inflated; a powerful privilege class is created whose principal interest is to secure the largest possible profit at the expense of the rest of the community; the natural opportunities for labor and production are restricted, and earnings, in spite of all increase in productive power, tend to remain at the bare subsistence level.

If we taxed land according to its unimproved value, the natural outlets for industry would be more freely available to labor and capital. Landholders would no longer be encouraged to keep back some land from use and enabled to exact inflated prices for other land. The production of wealth—of buildings and all other material commodities—would be stimulated.

If urban and suburban land were taxed on its true unimproved value, irrespective of the use to which it happens to be put or not to be put, the iron girdle of land monopoly which now confines every large town and industrial center, every village and hamlet, would be broken through, and we should have more and cheaper dwelling houses, shops, offices, warehouses and factories. If rural land were taxed on its true unimproved value, greater facilities would be granted to cultivators, allotments and small holdings would be more numerous, and the land would be used in ways more advantageous to the workers.

If mineral and stone-bearing lands were taxed on their true unimproved value, whether they happened to be worked or not, mining industry would be stimulated and its products cheapened. A further stimulus would be given industry by the concurrent remission of the taxes and rates which are now levied in the processes and products of industry.

As land comes to be more fully used and the restrictions and penalties on industry are removed, wages will correspondingly tend to find their level as the fair and full return for exertions. When fair conditions prevail, labor will freely and naturally be applied to land so as to yield the greatest total produce, and that total produce will be divided in just proportions between rent and wages.

When the landowner's monopoly power is destroyed by the taxation of land values we shall have free bargaining, which will produce just contracts, without any need for the State to regulate the terms on which we may live and work.

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## BOOKS

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### THE SINGLETAX EXPOSED.

**Single Tax a Fallacy.** By E. B. Silvers. A Refutation of the Theory of Single Taxation as Announced by Henry George. Special low price edition. Price, 50 cents. Convention Publishing Co., Kansas City, Missouri. 1912.

Mr. E. B. Silvers has had the misfortune to write a book. "Oh! that mine enemy would write a book!" said a great man of antiquity.

In this book, Mr. Silvers elaborates the strange idea that taxation originated in the proposition that each citizen ought to contribute equally to the support of the government; in other words,

that the people joined themselves into a government as they would join an improvement association or club, and, therefore, each one contributed his share to its support.

This is a pleasant dream, but it has no foundation in fact. History tells us a very different story about taxation originating in conquest, and being established by the sword.

The "farmers of the revenue" were the earliest tax gatherers. The right to tax a province was sold to the one who offered the most for it, and then this "farmer of the revenue" would descend on the helpless province and make as much as he could out of it.

They would have laughed at the idea of voluntary contribution. If anyone was suspected of having hidden property, they would torture him until he paid up.

This system of "farmers of the revenue" was general until the French Revolution, and has survived up to the present day in Turkey, Persia and China.

Mr. Silvers' assertion that the intention was to tax the individual citizen, and not to tax property, is absurd in the extreme. The very opposite is demonstrated by every page of history. A great French statesman said that the science of taxation consisted in getting as many feathers from the geese as possible without making them squawk.

Mr. Silvers asserts that the poll tax is the fundamental unit of our tax system. He seems to be blissfully unaware that the poll or head tax was originally levied against the feudal lord, according to the number of serfs he had under him, just the same as he was taxed so much a head on the number of cattle, sheep, hogs or other domestic animals he possessed.

Originally, therefore, the head tax was a just tax, for it was paid by the feudal lord himself because he was profiting by the labor of the serfs under his control.

The poll tax, therefore, far from being the ideal foundation of our tax system, as Mr. Silvers asserts, is a relic of barbarism and a survival of the dark ages. For this reason it has long ago been abolished by every civilized nation on the earth. It survives here and there locally, but the only principal nations of the earth wherein the poll tax is still levied to any extent are Russia, China, Turkey, Persia and the United States. In the United States it has been abolished in all but twenty States, and the twenty States that still have it are our most backward and least progressive States.

Mr. Silvers begins his book by saying that he does not claim to be a theoretical political economist, and he demonstrates it in his book by contradicting himself over and over again.

On page seven he says that the Mohammedan

may as well dispute the Koran, the Christian the Bible, as for the Singletaxer to renounce "Progress and Poverty" by Henry George. Then on page 100 he says that many persons who claim to be Singletaxers renounce Henry George's works on the subject.

On page ninety, Mr. Silvers says: "Increase the taxes on the lot and you increase the ground rent." He repeats this four times on page ninety, four times on page ninety-four, and again on page ninety-five. Yet, on page seventy-nine, he had said that the Singletax would destroy all land values. Now, these two opposite statements cannot both be true. But at the top of this same page seventy-nine Mr. Silvers says that any increased tax would compel a corresponding rise in market rent.

When we find any statement in this book that we do not agree with, all we have to do is to read a little farther to find it contradicted by the author himself. We may then quote Silvers against Silvers. On many pages he says that the Singletax would be equivalent to public ownership of all land; but reading farther we find him saying that it would cause ownership of all land to be concentrated in the hands of a few very rich private individuals.

After telling us that it will ruin all our farmers and make farming unprofitable, we find him, on page ninety-three, saying that the market price of the farmers' products would be greatly increased. He had better not preach that out in the country districts of Missouri, or he will have the farmers tumbling over each other to vote for the taxation amendments to the Missouri Constitution.

One may not be surprised, therefore, to find him saying that the Singletax will prevent land from being put to its best use, in spite of the fact that the greatest improvements on land are made by lessees of ground—lessees who pay all the taxes and all the ground rent besides; in other words, who pay the full economic rent.

Mr. Silvers says that the general property tax system which we have in Missouri is the proper and just system, in spite of the fact that most civilized nations have abolished this system of taxation. Even China has joined the other civilized nations in abolishing the general property tax.

Finally, Mr. Silvers says that land has an intrinsic value one thousand miles from the nearest habitation because a man could make a living on it by his own labor. In this statement he confuses utility value and value in exchange, or price. Let him try to sell that land to anybody else and he would find that it had no exchangeable value whatever—no price that he could realize for it—and it would continue to have no exchangeable value until settlers began to crowd around it and

all the free land of equal quality was occupied. Then it would begin to have a selling price, and that selling price would steadily increase as population became more dense and pressed more and more on the means of subsistence. This selling price of land measures accurately the economic advantage of the owner over the landless people around him. It also measures accurately the value conferred on the land by the pressure of population. The user of the land will not be able to raise any more bushels of wheat or corn or produce on the land selling for \$100 an acre than he did when it was worth nothing, and he will continue to raise just as much on it when this selling price has been decreased to a certain extent by taxation—in other words, when a part of this value which has been conferred on the land by the pressure of population has been transferred to the State to be used for the benefit of all the people who have created it.

Mr. Silvers says on page forty-three "that every recipient of the benefits of the government should pay therefor in proportion to his ability to pay and the material benefits he receives."

These two propositions of taxation are contrary in principle and mutually destructive and irreconcilable.

To pay in proportion to benefits received is the basis of the Singletax and is the principle embodied in the amendments proposed to the Missouri Constitution.

But to pay in proportion to ability is unknown as a taxation principle outside of the ransom collected by robber chiefs from the friends of the captives.

The only readable passages in the book are the extensive yet garbled extracts from Henry George.

W. P. HILL.



## LAND VALUE TAXATION.

### Outlines of Lectures on the Taxation of Land Values.

An Explanation with Illustrative Charts, Notes and Answers to Typical Questions, of the Land Labor and Fiscal Reform Advocated by Henry George. By Louis F. Post. Published by The Public, Ellsworth Building, Chicago. 1912. Price, 30 cents.

I am much pleased to see this fourth edition of Post's *Lectures on the Single Tax*, revised and finely printed, at so popular a price. "Progress and Poverty" is a text book and a condensed text book, adapted best to studious minds; but these lectures are not only clear, but they take up, as old John Swinton said, "first things first."

Anyone who has assimilated the illustrations about the origin and character of bread, used as a simple sample of Wealth, has a "straight edge" to which he may refer all questions of Capital as opposed to Labor or Wages.

Having to answer questions constantly, especi-

ally in public, I have, ever since the first edition came out, gone over "Answers to Typical Questions" at least once a year for my own benefit. They are one product of a three years' lecture trip of Mr. Post, where each new question and the answer was preserved for further consideration. Mr. Post's admirable practice was to ask, "Is that answer satisfactory?" and answers that appeared most generally sufficient were afterward discussed, combined, condensed and substantially adopted.

Anyone who knows those answers will be delivered from the temptation to gain a cheap triumph by "putting down" an enquirer with a smart but inconclusive reply.

BOLTON HALL.

## PERIODICALS

### The American.

Senator La Follette concludes in the American for July his instructive as well as brilliant story of his own life in American politics. He climaxes with Dolliver the awakened, Taft the putty ball, and Aldrich the architect—of his own fortune.



### Everybody's.

C. P. Connolly closes in the July Everybody's his suggestive series of articles on "Big Business and the Bench." One of the effects of this work of his has been a good deal of "smoking-out." Another is a better understanding of some of the reasons why so much is said and done to hedge about the bench with superstitious confidence. That judges are men, to be judged by the use they make of their ermine and not by the fact that they wear it, is a valuable lesson to learn.

### The Sad Truth.

Arthur Young in Puck of June 26. Reproduced in The Public by courteous permission of the Editor of Puck.



Investigator—"But surely your children are already old enough to work?"  
Coal-Miner's Wife—"No. Their faces deceive you. They have already worked enough to become old."