

## John C. Lincoln Says

Is robbery of an individual producer any less wrong than robbery of the community as a whole? Individuals produce wealth by their labor; it can be produced in no other way. It belongs, then, of a right to the community as a whole.

A landowner might be confined to an insane asylum, unaware of and incapable of taking part in what is going on around him, and yet his land would increase in value with the growth of his town exactly as it would if here were free and in full possession of his wits.

Land a thousand miles from civilization would have no value. But when men, prompted by competition and high prices for land at home, move to new territory, civilization moves with them. Civilization means the countless thousands of necessities, conveniences and luxuries that facilitate the production and exchange of wealth and add to the comfort of living.

It is those advantages, those benefits and services, some supplied by government, some by private enterprise, and some arising spontaneously from the association of men engaged in making a living, that give value to land.

What they pay to those users of the preferred sites is commonly spoken of as economic rent, or ground rent. It is beside the point to argue whether such payments are made for the use of land or for the social and public advantages pertaining to land. The point is that such payments *are* made. They are made by the tenant to the landlord when one man rents land from another. They are made by the landowner to himself when he uses his land instead of renting it to another user. In the latter case, the payment is made and received when the landowner sells the product of his land. What he receives for the product over and above interest on his capital and wages on his labor is ground rent.

Now the question arises, to whom should such payments be made, to whom do they rightly belong? Clearly they cannot belong to the landowner. He has done no more than any other citizen to supply the advantages which give value to land nor does he make any return in goods or services for the rent he collects. Ground rent is a by-product of society, a value which arises solely because people are present and busy. It belongs of a right to the community, and it should be used for the expenses of the community.

—From the February *Lincoln Letter*