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Municipal Ownership and the Single Tax.
By James Middleton

IN THE LAST ISSUE of Harlequin, Clement Lacy has a very interesting article on Municipal Ownership. He demonstrates conclusively, from actual experience of many cities which have tried the experiment, the wisdom and success of municipal ownership of municipal franchises. So far as I know, only one city, Philadelphia, has taken a backward step and that was undoubtedly due to lack of civil service and to corruption by those who wished again to exploit the city through private ownership.

Among the benefits arising, Mr. Lacy shows raised wages, shorter hours of labor, insurance benefits to employees, better services and lower fares.

After showing all these he throws the fat in the fire by saying "I don't favor municipal ownership—or scarcely any kind of reform not absolutely necessary—until such economic changes can be brought to pass as will secure the benefits to the whole community, instead of to a small class of non-producers!" In other words he will have no municipal ownership, no matter how beneficial, until we have the single tax to break up land monopoly, because forsooth municipal ownership or any other reform, tends to increase rent.

Many single-taxers hold that position. Is it tenable? Did even Henry George act on that theory?

It is undoubtedly true under present conditions that the landlord would gradually absorb an undue share of any public improvement and it is undoubtedly true under a just application of the single tax he would be shorn of that power.

Nevertheless, I believe some reforms should precede the single tax and any real reform like municipal ownership should be helped along regardless of the benefit to the landlords.

I hold this, not only on the broad ground of steady advancement of civilization on every line, but also as one who believes the single tax an ideal way of raising the public revenues.

Mr. Lacy really answered himself when he said:

“After all, permanent reform is more easily effected through improved economic

and fiscal systems than through the election to office of stronger or worthier men.”

Municipal ownership certainly is such a reform diminishing, as he has shown, corruption in public affairs.

The more you increase honesty in public affairs the more easy it will be to get fair votea and honest counts.

The great single tax leader so recently gone to his well-earned rest saw this when he worked for ballot reform.

George lived to see ballot reform an accomplished fact in many states.

He was an ardent worker for municipal ownership of municipal franchises and national ownership of national franchises. He worked for free trade and for a sensible paper currency in place of our present hybrid monstrosity.

All these reforms must come and we should work for them in the proper time and place as did Henry George.

If they should all come before the abolition of land monopoly, there will be so much less to be done when that is accomplished.

Perhaps, too, the working out of these reforms may be necessary to bring into clear relief the evils of land monopoly.

There are certain reforms which must precede the abolition of land monopoly if we would bring in the new era without dire disaster.

For instance government savings banks and government insurance must be ready to take the place of banks and insurance based on land monopoly.

Finally, I would say that even the introduction of an equitable system of taxation and the abolition of earned monopoly are not fundamental reforms, but means to ends, and not the only means either, for socialism presents another way to similar results.

The fundamental reform is to establish the commonwealth of truth, justice and love. Whatever leads to the recognition and living up to the true brotherhood of man calls for our support.

When every one shall be actuated by the golden rule best systems and beat

methods will come and poorest systems and poorest methods will lose their sting.

I come, therefore, to the reverse conclusion of Clement Lacy and favor municipal ownership and all other reforms that lead to the betterment of humanity.