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THE LANDLESS MILLIONAIRES

Clarence A. Miller

How the Single Tax Will Reach Them. Clarence A. Miller explains the New Idea. The Single Tax Meeting; Last Evening, Some Interesting Features of the Gathering—A Lively Discussion.

The second public meeting of the Single Tax club was held last night at Unity church. The attendance was large, the audience comprising ladies as well as gentlemen, many of whom are prominent in business and literary circles. In the audience were also several residents of Pasadena, who came expressly to attend the meeting.

Ralph K. Hoyt presided, and announced a fine musical and intellectual programme for the next meeting, to be held February 10th. He also stated that in all probability Mr. T. D. Stimson, now in Chicago, would be present at the next meeting. Mr. Bennett announced that the midwinter fair lecture committee had sent an invitation to Henry George to visit San Francisco and lecture on his favorite topic. Also that William Lloyd Garrison would be invited to do so. It was expected that if these distinguished gentlemen came to the coast they would be induced to visit this city and speak on tax reform. A large number of persons added their names to the list of members, and much enthusiasm was manifested. After the transaction of some further business Mr. Clarence A. Miller was introduced as the speaker of the evening. He was greeted with hearty applause at the opening, and during his concise and logical address he elicited frequent demonstrations of approval from nearly all present. After Mr. Miller's address some time was spent with questions from the audience and answers by members of the club.

Following is a synopsis of what the speaker said, on How Will the Single Tax Reach the Millionaires Who do Not Own Land?

It is safe to say that in nine cases out of ten this is the first question that suggests itself by way of objection when one first hears of the proposition to confine taxation to land values. the question, in all its direct and indirect bearings, touches the philosophy of the single tax throughout its length, across its breadth and down in its depths. A complete answer to that question would involve a complete exposition of the doctrines of the single tax. And yet, while the bearings of this question are so comprehensive, the question itself is not so broad as would at first appear. Who are the rich men whose fortunes do not materially involve land ownership?

Land, as we mean it when we propose to tax its value—land as any reputable writer on political economy means it—consists of and includes all natural resources, whether the soil, building sites, city or farm lots, mines, watercourses, lakes, water power, water fronts, natural forests or the like — everything that furnishes the human race material from which, by labor, we make food, clothing, shelter and the countless things that minister to our wants, desires and pleasures, and which in general constitute wealth, in the scientific sense of the term, as used by political economists. And the term land, as we need it and propose to tax its value, excludes all wealth — that is, excludes everything that is produced by labor of any kind — excludes houses, excludes orchard trees and growing crops, mineral after it is taken out — water after it is stored. It includes the reservoir site and excludes the artificial reservoir. It includes the springs and sources of water, but excludes the water when collected in the artificial reservoir. It includes the gold and silver and coal when in the bowels of the earth, but excludes it when brought to the surface. The millionaire whose wealth consists in mining stocks, and who is therefore a part owner in valuable mines, is consequently a land owner. So also he whose wealth consists in railroad stocks, because the railroad franchises and rights of way are land, whose value we tax. But in so far as these stocks have value from the improvements on those mines, such as stamp mills; or the improvements along the railroads, such as rails and ties, the rolling stock, depots, and the like, they will go free; we want them to go scot free of taxation, and hope that by this encouragement more and more of such improvements will be made.

It is true that under the single tax all stock in corporations of every description would not be taxed as such. But the property of that corporation, so far as it consisted of land, as already defined, would be taxed; so far as it consisted of wealth exclusive of such land it would be untaxed.

And yet this still leaves large fortunes consisting of stocks in banking corporations, steamboat corporations, manufacturing concerns, immense wholesale and retail stores and the like, which would go practically untaxed. And the question is: How will the single tax reach them? This, it is evident, is only part of the more comprehensive question: How will the single tax reach wealth that has been created by labor? And the answer is: Directly, it will not reach it at all. It is the very purpose of the single tax to lift the burden of taxation from all enterprise—from all wealth produced by labor—from all the products of labor—and therefore from labor itself. "Dare you propose," I think I hear some one ask, "to exempt from his share of the expenses of this government the millionaire who has been shrewd enough to deal altogether in personal property?" The speaker in answer to this first asked the question: "How do you reach that millionaire now?" He showed that for centuries the world had been trying to tax that millionaire and

had failed. He showed how all taxes upon the products of labor under conditions of competition are added to the price of those products, and are visited finally upon the consumer. He showed how, in addition to that, because of the impracticability of discovering and valuing such personal property, and because of the elasticity of conscience of the owner in making his tax returns, the millionaire owner, in a large number of cases, actually escaped paying anything by way of taxes, and yet collected them, just the same as if he had paid them, by increased prices to his customers.

But it may be urged, the speaker said, that reform must lie in increasing the direct taxation of millionaires, not in tax exemptions. We are living under conditions productive of gigantic fortunes on the one hand and hundreds of thousands of tramps and unemployed on the other. We are told, therefore, that we must attack these millions and confiscate at least portions of it, under the name of taxation, for the public treasury. The plan is very captivating to many. It is impliedly based upon one or all of these propositions: That their millions were unjustly obtained; that the millionaire is a public enemy, who must be punished, or that all machinery and other personal property used in the course of production is by right, or should be, common property. The speaker then went on in answer to say that single tax men were neither communists or socialists; that in so far as the millionaire's millions are engaged in production they are a public benefit and not a public curse; that the products of labor belong not to the public but to the producer or to him who pays that producer for it; that thus the right of property in labor products is based upon a man's right to himself and to his own faculties, and that there is, theoretically, no limit to the amount of such property which a man might honestly acquire and should rightfully hold. Should he pay taxes on it? Not so long as the public had any common fund to draw from. And the public has a common fund that is all its own—raised by a tax on natural resources which no man created, but to which all are in equity entitled. But as to the many cases, the speaker continued, in which these millions were unjustly obtained, here especially was where the single tax would reach the millionaire. Not, indeed, by taking his property and redistributing it or seizing it for the public. The single tax is a practical measure. Human ingenuity cannot unravel the complicated history of any one of such fortunes, nor discover the individuals who have been robbed. We cannot redress past robberies. We shall not punish the guilty, because we are all alike to blame. We are responsible for the millionaire and the tramp, because we enact the laws and create the conditions under which they breed. The single tax has no personal fight with the rich; no demagogical and transient charities to offer to the poor. The single tax will abolish unjust conditions, unlock natural opportunities and resources now unjustly withheld, force land into use by taxing it according to the use that should be made of it, make labor independent by putting nature herself into the market to bid for that labor against the employer, encourage capital and labor, and destroy monopoly. The single tax will raise wages. It will

prevent the future accumulation of unjust millions by forcing and getting to work the natural laws of trade and production, and in that way will reach the millionaire. It will abolish monopoly and, in that way, reach the millionaire. It will free labor from the necessity of accepting the exacting terms of the grasping rich, and in that way reach the millionaire. But the millionaire who uses his wealth in honest production, who uses it to improve and open the boundless resources of our land, who believes in good wages and in the independence and manhood of labor, who believes in equal opportunity for all and monopoly for none, he need have no fear. The single tax will not reach him except to help him.

In the lowest and highest senses, the single tax attempts to "reach" no one to his injury, but all, rich and poor alike, to their welfare.