

To the Editor:

The argument presented by Professor von Mises is unassailable on its face—that is, ignoring certain important, not stated considerations. This argument is that if the government takes the whole of rent it makes no difference to a given farmer, from the viewpoint of his income, whether he works on poor or good land. No other farmer has an advantage over him in this respect. It is perfectly true. He has, then, no income-incentive to move to land of higher quality. We assume, of course, that he is not working on submarginal land. Since marginal and submarginal lands pay no rent, there would always be the incentive of higher wages to bring him from submarginal to marginal-or-better land. This seems to me entirely as it should be, the farmer's income depending upon his wages and increasing by improvement of his skill and industry.

The community, the "other people" of whom Professor von Mises speaks, have no concern to move any particular farmer from poor above-marginal land to better when they must move another farmer from that land to make room for him. Their concern is to have the above-marginal land fully utilized—to bring to vacant, good land, farmers from poorer land.

The persistent vacancy of good land is a sure sign that too much is being asked for it in rent. It would mean that the government was trying to take more than the rent. The practice of demanding too high rent is what keeps good land idle. This is the evil which George's proposal is intended chiefly to correct and it is as bad when practised by government as by private owners. It is no part of George's proposal.

The aim of assessors should be to keep substantially all above-marginal land in use, assessing rents low enough to accomplish this result, low enough to attract prospective users away from land at or below the margin. If a small percentage of rent is left with owners little harm will be done provided the margin is raised by bringing the good land more generally into use.

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