

care very much whether it is paying into the school fund sufficient ground rent, and that they very especially care whether it has managed by hook and by crook to procure such an alteration of its ground lease as to reduce its rental obligations for 90 years to an absurdly inadequate sum. We can agree with the Tribune, however, when it says it "made a grave mistake and threw away a great opportunity in 1867"; for it "could then, instead of leasing school land, have bought at a comparatively low price almost any other corner in the business district," and "if it had done that it would now have a large estate in fee simple in the down town district," and "would have had to pay no rent, and the value of its real estate would constantly have been advancing," so that "the increase in value would in itself have been a fortune." That was indeed a grave mistake on the Tribune's part. But it does not follow that the Tribune ought to be allowed to repair its grave mistake out of the increasing value of the estate of the school children, as it is doing. Unfortunately for the public good, Chicago, like other cities, does permit private interests to profit by the advancing values which the whole community attaches by its growth to particular sites. This is institutional and cannot at present be rectified. But these profits go only to persons who do not make the "grave mistake" of throwing away opportunities to buy chances in the profits of community growth. Persons who throw away such opportunities ought to bear up under the consequences of their "grave mistakes," and not try to play a "sneak" game on the school children by stealthily taking away from them the advancing values of their estate.

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#### Called to Account.

Lee Meriwether of St. Louis has done excellent public service not only as an agitator against the villainous performances of the Interests in St. Louis politics, but also in holding their malignant newspapers to account. In 1901 and 1902 he ably led the municipal ownership and equal taxation movement in St. Louis. This brought him plump against the financial and political corruptionists of that city. Although elected mayor beyond all reasonable question he was brazenly counted out. And because he did not surrender to the Interests, their organ, the St. Louis Republic, began a campaign of virulent abuse. It called him "crank," "socialist," "anarchist," etc., and when it found that these epithets didn't hurt, it accused him of trafficking in nominations and playing his followers false. Then Mr. Meriwether

sued the St. Louis Republic for libel. In two cases he has been forced to two trials each and he has obtained four verdicts. One of these verdicts, for \$10,000, is now pending in the Supreme Court of the State; another, for \$4,500 and costs, the St. Louis Republic has paid with its check for \$4,914.75, dated the 19th of October last.

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Mr. Meriwether is to be congratulated on his pluck and on his success. And he is to be commended for giving that publicity to the matter which the St. Louis Republic withholds. In advising the public of his legal battle and triumph, Mr. Meriwether pertinently writes: "Of the 100,000 persons who read the libels none will ever know from anything in the columns of the St. Louis Republic that it was convicted four times in open court of publishing foul slanders. The Republic seeks to keep the public ignorant of the outcome of these suits; not even in its news reports did it contain the slightest announcement of the court's ruling; the rulings in all the cases except mine were duly announced in the Republic, but the fact that on that same day the Court of Appeals decided a libel suit in my favor was carefully suppressed. The press must not be muzzled; it must have the fullest freedom of criticism, even of condemnation. But no newspaper has a right because it dislikes a man's political or economical opinions, to vilify that man and falsely accuse him of doing dishonorable things. I know it is bad taste to obtrude one's private affairs upon the public, but in a sense these libel suits are not private. I believe it should be widely known that no matter how rich, how powerful a newspaper is, it may still be punished if it steals away a man's good name. And so believing, it seems not inappropriate to make known by this letter the result of my four years' legal battle for justice and vindication."

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### IS THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE A SINGLE TAX CONVERT?

The Chicago Tribune said, in a recent editorial:

The Tribune company made a grave mistake and threw away a great opportunity in 1867. It could then, instead of leasing school land, have bought at a comparatively low price almost any other corner in the business district. If it had done that it would now have a large estate in fee simple in the downtown district. It would have had to pay no rent, and the value of its real estate would constantly have been advancing. The increase in value would in itself have been a fortune.

If the Tribune is capable of "recognizing the

truth when it meets it in the road," it will perceive that the above, from its own pen, is a strong argument in favor of the single tax plan of taxation.

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Had the Tribune had the opportunity to buy and had it bought the school land in 1867 which it now holds on lease, it would have had to pay no ground rent thence evermore. And in addition, it would now be in possession of a fortune which is owned by the public. It could have retained forever the nearly \$50,000 which it now pays annually to the public, and all increases of value besides.

Think of the significance of this. The Tribune pays annually to the public nearly \$50,000 rent on a little patch of ground 120 feet by 144 feet! And that is less than private owners are obtaining for other corner lots in the vicinity.

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Every man, woman and child in Chicago is a joint owner and beneficiary of this \$50,000 a year. What if the public had retained possession of all the land in Chicago? Then all the people of Chicago—the poor equally with the rich—would have been to-day in possession of a prodigious fortune the income from which would have endowed every individual citizen with a degree of affluence far beyond anything that the majority can hope for in their wildest dreams for the future.

It would be interesting to know what is the sum total of ground rent annually paid in the city, and also the aggregate paid in wages. If ground rent equals wages, then the application of the single tax would benefit the wage men of Chicago equal to a one hundred per cent. advance in wages!

If the average wage rate is two dollars per day, then the single tax would increase wages to four dollars per day.

And the economic conditions of such advance in the income of the wage men would prevent any consequent advance in the prices that they pay for the things they consume. It would be a clear, net gain, of which they could not be deprived except by outright theft.

Now, in the case of the Chicago Tribune, it confesses—or rather asserts—that if it had bought in 1867 it would now have had a fortune in the unearned increase in value of the land—a fortune which it now does not possess, and which it does not claim. Had it bought the land with borrowed money, it could have paid principal and

interest and taxes, with greatly less than it has paid to the public in rent, and would to-day have been in possession of a fortune worth much more than \$50,000 a year, and rapidly increasing in value. And this vast fortune it would have secured, not by giving value to the public for value received, but solely by going through the legal form of securing title to the land. That is, by paying cash down for the value of the site in 1867, it would have secured scot free all the enormously increasing value since.

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This increasing value is not earned by the private holder of title to the land. No school of economists claims that it is. The implication from the Tribune's declaration is that it would have possessed, without earning it.

What are a man's earnings? Are they not, clearly, what he produces?

Or to change the form: Does not a man earn what he produces? If so, then surely it cannot be claimed that a man produces what he does not earn.

It follows then that the owner of unearned increment possesses something which he has not produced.

But since it exists, it has been produced.

By whom, then, if not by the possessor?

Why, by the general public, of course.

And the single tax would distribute to the general public that which it produces—the so-called "unearned increment" in land values. And that, too (as has been shown above) without taking anything from the possessor of land, but merely by withholding from him that which rightly belongs to the public.

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Why do the landlords and land speculators oppose the single tax?

Precisely because it is just. It would prevent them from securing what they do not earn. It would enrich the masses, whom the present system of taxation impoverishes.

EDWARD HOWELL PUTNAM.

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The only person who has ever adopted an adequate punishment for tax dodging, according to a report from one of our correspondents, is an ingenious tax collector of a thriving town in the state of Missouri. He says a certain Missouri newspaper quotes from that functionary this luminous notice:

"All persons are hereby notified to pay their dog tax by April 1; otherwise they will be killed."

—Case and Comment