

WHAT IS "IT"? By MARK A. SULLIVAN (Secretary, Council of Georgist Organizations)

The discussion over whether or not "it" is a tax (in GJ No. 38) was very interesting, and I feel that valid points were made by both sides.

A few more points, I think, could be added to the discussion. One is that "it" is as much an abolition of taxation as a form of taxation: "To abolish all taxation save that upon land values" (Henry George). Second, there is more than one way to implement "it", and some of them don't involve taxation at all, such as the community land trust formulat d by Ralph Borsodi. Third, given these two points, Georgism is a way to free labor from exploitation, especially government taxation and the private appropriation of land rent. This suggests to me that land value taxation is not "it".

There seems to be among Georgists the notion that we hav t got "it" due to a wrong choice of words. As a result, "single tax" fell into disuse, and some have suggested not mentioning Henry George to inquirers. This sort of scapegoat- ing of vocabulary is really a symptom of - not a solution to - the problem.

As I see it, the problem (lack of support) is that Georgists have put too much emphasis on land value taxation (often as a band-aid to government overspending) and not enough emphasis on the ultimate purpose of LVT as intended by Henry George:

"The great benefit of the appropriation of land values to public use would not be in the revenue that it would give, so much as in the abolition of restrictions upon the free play of productive forces that it would involve or permit. It is not by the mere levying of a tax that we propose to abolish poverty; it is by 'securing the blessings of liberty.'

"The abolition of all taxes that restrain production or hamper exchange, the doing away with all monopolies and special privileges that enable one citizen to levy toll upon the industries of other citizens, is an integral part of our program. To merely take land values in taxation for public purposes would not of itself suffice. If the proceeds were spent in maintaining useless parasites or standing armies, labor might still be oppressed and harried by taxes and special privileges. We might still have poverty, and people might still beg for alms or die of starvation." (The Standard, January 21, 1888)

So whether "it" is a tax or not misses the boat. My own emphasis is not on LVT but on the ultimate purpose, "to abolish poverty...by 'securing the blessings of liberty'." This is much more than LVT, and for me, this is "IT."