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EDITORIAL

Investments under the Singletax in Seattle.

The Post-Intelligencer of Seattle, in its issue of January 30th, discloses ideas of the effect of the Singletax on "real estate" investments as mixed as is the term "real estate" itself. Arguing against the Singletax proposal now pending before the people of Seattle, it avers that if it were adopted "real estate investments" would go away from Seattle; and this, the "P.-I." adds, would be "a bad thing for Seattle." But would it be bad for Seattle? That depends upon what is meant by "real estate."



If "real estate" means only the site of Seattle, the mere land, the location, the spot on which to improve Seattle, then it is very likely that investments in "real estate"—that particular kind of real estate—would give Seattle a wide berth. But this wouldn't be bad for Seattle. On the contrary, it would be good for Seattle. It would lessen speculative competition for building sites, which would make them cheaper without making them less desirable for building purposes. It would therefore offer a greater inducement for investments in the kind of "real estate" that consists of buildings and other improvements. But if the "P.-I." includes improvements when it says "real estate," then it is wrong in its notion as to the effect of the Singletax. *The Singletax exempts improvements.* In so far, then, as improvements are con-

cerned, the Singletax proposal would not turn real estate investments away from Seattle; it would draw investments in real estate improvements to Seattle.



The investment tendency of the Singletax charter amendment, if adopted by the people of Seattle next March, would be to check speculative investments in vacant lots and to invite investments in buildings and other improvements. It would *discourage* the kind of investments in Seattle that would profit nobody but land speculators, that would employ nobody but land brokers, and that would have no public effect but to retard the city's growth; it would *encourage* the kind of investments that profit producers, that employ workers, and that promote the city's growth.



Let the "P.-I." analyze its ambiguous term "real estate" so as to be able to consider the two kinds of "real estate" separately—sites and improvements. Then let it consider the effect of the Singletax upon investments in so much of what that term expresses as is only *mother earth*, and distinctively upon so much as is *improvement*. If, having thoughtfully done that, the "P.-I." continues to think that the Singletax, which exempts improvements from all taxation and places taxes only upon mother earth *ad valorem*, would discourage desirable investments in Seattle, its explanation of why it thinks so would make one of the most illuminating and interesting editorials it has ever printed.



Congressman George's Land-speculation Bill.

A bill of national importance, though directly applicable only to the District of Columbia, which has been introduced in Congress by Henry George, Jr., the member from New York who, at the elections of 1910, turned a Republican constituency of 7,000 majority into a Democratic one of 2,000 majority, is now under consideration by the committee on the District of Columbia, of which Congressman George is a member. The importance and beneficial purpose of this measure has been explained in a statement by Mr. George which we quote from the Washington press. He says:

I have introduced a bill to check land speculation in the District of Columbia. The circumstances here are different from those existing in any other part of the country. The General Government pays one-half of the expenses of the District government. It has, moreover, erected the most magnificent government buildings here and has projected a group along the Mall that will, when completed, make the most

superb collection of marble structures ever erected outside of ancient Athens and imperial Rome. These facts have excited very active land speculation. Fortunes have been and are being made merely by buying and selling land in the District of Columbia. The taxation laws have long fostered this speculation. Personal property is assessed annually and at its full value; but land is assessed only every third year and then at two-thirds of its value. The tax rate is on its face but one per cent—one and one-half per cent on a two-thirds valuation. On the very valuable land in the heart of the city and on the large speculative areas where home-building booms are about to develop, the tax rate is much lower. This is not chargeable to the assessing authorities, but to the very bad system under which they have had to work. The miracle is that the assessment and taxation results in respect to land values in the District of Columbia are as good as they are under such a poor system. My bill provides for an annual assessment and the increase of the valuation of land to the full market value. The rate of valuation will be gradually increased and at the same time will entirely exempt all improvements. The bill is intended to encourage improvements and discourage land speculation. It will benefit home owners and cause the owners of valuable land to pay more revenue into the District treasury. I expect it to get the opposition of many of the land speculators in Washington; but, on the other hand, I believe it will get the hearty support in Congress of members who have awakened to the fact that a comparatively few men have been availing themselves of the assessment and taxation laws to exploit the District of Columbia and the treasury of the United States, for their own pockets.



In form the George bill is a revision and codification of the laws now in operation at the site of our national capital for the taxation of real estate. It provides for the assessment of all real estate in the District, except such as is specifically exempt, and upon a sliding scale annually, so that in 1917 and thereafter all the real estate taxation of the District will have been concentrated upon land values. For this purpose the bill is a model for use by State Legislatures and city councils where the policy proposed is not un-Constitutional. It provides that—

the true value of each separate lot or tract of land shall be determined, and the true value of the land shall be shown separately from the true value of the improvements.

This having been done, the scaling process begins in 1913 when—

the land shall be assessed eleven-fifteenths of its true value, and each year thereafter the assessment shall be increased progressively as follows: In the year 1914 the assessment shall be twelve-fifteenths; in the year 1915, thirteen-fifteenths; in the year 1916, fourteen-fifteenths; in the year 1917, and each year thereafter, fifteen-fifteenths, or the true value.