

know how Henry George treated that definition when speaking of the term wealth. So let us take our cue from Mr. George, and just see what the terms "private property," "public property" and "common property" really mean.

When we are buying property or goods, we are not buying mere material things such as soil, wood, stone or iron, made up into certain forms. We are buying utilities or material services. Some special forms of matter that have been "moved, combined or separated, or in other ways modified" so as to admit of the natural power they possess being directed to the advantage of man. The function of goods can consist in nothing else than in a giving off, or rendering up, or putting forth—or to use the terminology of physical science—the passing of energy into the satisfaction of a concrete want. We value and desire and possess goods only on account of the utility or usefulness that are expected from them, and the material itself from which they are made form only the bodily shell. It is the utility of a thing that we buy and sell, and not the mere labor-form, and the market value of a utility is the social estimate of the services which the good will render. It is not mere physical matter we desire, it is utility, or material services. Utility is the basis of value. physical property is merely the form—the bodily shell, as it were.

So when we speak of the value of a thing, we mean its utility or usefulness, and this is real property. The real meaning of property then, is the material services which the goods possess, or which fit them to satisfy human desires. These utilities are the completed goods ready for the consumer, and they have embodied in them certain material services which are contributed from three different sources, namely—(1) Services rendered by the individual (those of them that work). (2) Services rendered by Society through government; and—(3) Services rendered by nature. These three factors co-operate in producing commodities or utilities, and no one of them can produce anything in modern society that will satisfy human desires without the assistance of one or both of the others. And it is a law of nature that each of those whose services are required in forming utilities should receive their just share of the joint product and in proportion to the services rendered. Nature demands that every atom which it contributes shall be returned to it. And it is also a law of nature that each of the other factors should receive theirs. That share of the product that remains with the individual is his own private property, and that share which is retained by the State is public property, and the services rendered by nature in the form of matter and natural forces, such as gravity, cohesion, resistance, sunshine, air and moisture—the whole combined into unity—is *common* property. Common to both

society and to the individual, freely rendered. Common to all and special to none. These natural forces cannot possibly be individually and exclusively owned, because nature is unity and not divisible. Land cannot therefore be individually owned because it is common to all and not special to any. No one can fence in a piece of land and say "this part of nature is special to me—exclusively mine from the zenith to the center of the earth." Where is the dividing line? If the planet Mars should cross the boundary line it would come within his title-deed. A part of material nature cannot be separated from the whole, being as "one in the many and the many in one." Nature cannot be individualized. But the rent of land is the product of society; and balances the value of the services which society renders.

The product that is embodied in rent is public property, and no person can rightfully claim even a fraction of it. Private property, on the other hand, is the product of the individual. Farm improvements, houses and implements, consumption goods, in fact whatever he has produced and received by rendering his services, are his own private property. When, however, certain persons claim portions of the land as their "private property" and demand a share of the product for the use of it, they are receiving products for which they have rendered no services. And to say that it is just to allow these men a share of the product as payment for the services rendered by nature, is to recognize them as creators of nature. Those products received by the landlords are taken from the laborers. Society, through government, demands and must receive its share of the product, and if that share does not come in a natural way, it must come some other way.

As to a title as private owner of land, it is not necessary for one to have a title as private owner in order to secure ownership in the improvements. All that is necessary is a title to the improvements and this will include the warranty of possession in whatever form they may exist in space. And this is all one is entitled to providing he renders to society full payment for value received.

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## PROPERTY IN LAND.

LETTER FROM JOHN Z. WHITE.

Editor *Single Tax Review*:

The question has been asked me, what Mr. George meant when he said: "If private property in land be just, then is the remedy I propose a false one; if, on the contrary, private property in land be unjust, then is this remedy the true one."

In the same line of thought, on page 384, he said: "as nature gives only to labor.

the exertion of labor in production is the only title to exclusive possession."

Again on the same page: "When non-producers can claim as rent a portion of the wealth created by producers, the right of the producers to the fruits of their labor is to that extent denied."

On page 401, he said: "Neither on the ground of equity or expediency is there anything to deter us from making land common property by confiscating rent."

On page 326, he said, in italics: "*We must make land common property.*"

On page 403, he says: "I do not propose either to purchase or to confiscate private property in land."

On the same page, again in italics, he said: "*It is not necessary to confiscate land; it is only necessary to confiscate rent.*"

In his preface to the fourth edition of *Progress and Poverty*, dated New York, 1880, Mr. George said: "What I have most endeavored to do is to establish general principles, trusting in my readers to carry further their application where this is needed." In the same, he said, "It has been impossible to treat with the fullness they deserve many of the questions raised."

Many quotations to like effect may be made, but as if to end the matter, he said, on page 403: "By leaving to land owners a percentage of rent which would probably be much less than the cost and loss involved in attempting to rent lands through State agency, and by making use of this existing machinery, we say, without shock or jar, assert the common right to land by taking rent for public uses."

And further on same page, he said, speaking of land owners: "Let them continue to call it *their* land."

Finally, page 404, he said: "In form, the ownership of land would remain just as now. \* \* For rent being taken by the State in taxes, land, no matter in whose name it stood, or in what parcels it was held, would be really common property."

These quotations seem to be a sufficient answer to the question asked. "In form the ownership of land would remain just as now." In essence landlordism would be a thing of the past, for the essence of landlordism is the legal power privately to appropriate rent.

Those who refuse to perceive the difference between form and essence, will not be able to defend Mr. George against the charge of flat contradiction—even more than one. He said repeatedly that he would take rent in taxation. He also said he would leave land owners a percentage of rent. He repeatedly declared private property in land to be unjust. He also said, "Let them continue to call it *their* land," and "In form the ownership of land would remain just as now."

If, however, we accept his work as an endeavor "to establish general principles," and also prove worthy of the trust he placed in his readers; that is, to perceive the valid-

ity of those principles and "to carry further their application where this is needed," we will have no difficulty in arriving at the conclusion that by the words "private property in land" Mr. George meant the legal power privately to appropriate rent. Also, that by the words "common property in land," he meant the public appropriation of rent.

The words "private property in land" have two meanings. One meaning is, the legal power privately to appropriate rent. The other meaning is, the legal power exclusively to possess land in perpetuity.

The first power is the essence of landlordism. It was attacked by all the force George possessed. The second power is landownership, and this George did not attack, but on the contrary said, if his plan were adopted, would "continue just as now."

Land ownership is the legal power exclusively to possess land in perpetuity. In the absence of a wise use of the power of taxation landlordism inevitably will be incidental to landownership.

An individual may possess land in perpetuity without resulting harm to any one; but the private appropriation of rent is surely accompanied by injustice.

The value of land has nothing to do with the validity of its title. If a man holds title to a parcel of land of no value, he is nevertheless a landowner.

In the sense that George used the words I believe in "common property in land" in what seems to me to be a technically accurate use of the words. I believe in private ownership of land. Ownership comes before rent appropriation. If the legal power exclusively to possess in perpetuity is landownership, George did not endeavor to abolish private property in land. If the legal power privately to appropriate rent is landlordism, George did attempt its overthrow—and his attempt is proving to be successful.

If, then, we alter the wording of the question in accordance with Mr. George's continually expressed thought, we may state its meaning thus: "If the private appropriation of land rent is just, then is our cause unjust."

JOHN Z. WHITE.

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FROM JAMES W. BUCKLIN.

Editor *Single Tax Review*:

The interesting discussion of the question of "Private Property in Land" in the columns of the *Review* arises, I believe, not mainly from differences in principle, nor even from differences in policy, but from different uses or meanings of the term "Private Property in Land." Until the meaning of the words used are clearly defined and agreed upon, a continuance of the discussion may be productive of harm rather than of good.