

RENT AS PAYMENT FOR SERVICE

EDITORS LAND AND FREEDOM :

In a letter to a newspaper editor by one who I assume would regard himself as a "single taxer," the latter speaks of the "Rent of land"; and supports the justice of its public collection with the familiar axioms: "The earth had no cost of production," and "To the producer belongs the product."

If it be true that the earth had no cost of production, the land, it would seem, should be the cheapest thing there is. In that case, how can the payment of the rent mentioned be the rent of *land*? If it be true that to the producer belongs the product, how can that which is called the rent of *land* belong to mankind, individually or collectively? If this particular kind of rent really belongs to mankind, must it not, according to these very axioms, be the rent, not of *land*, but of things of which men are the producers, things which are the product of their labor?

How convince people that this particular kind of rent belongs to mankind unless they be given proof that, actually, it is payment for the use of things of which men *are* the producers—among which, as they will be obliged to admit, *land is not*? Since land (the earth) is a condition precedent to all life, existing at all times and in all circumstances at no cost of human labor, a challenge to find logical support for the assumption that the rent referred to as the "Rent of land" constitutes a *financial factor* in the problem of establishing an intelligent social order, might help in that direction.

On the other hand, to promulgate the idea that *land* (which was "all done and paid for" before men appeared on earth) is a financial factor affecting the relations of the human producer and *his* product would seem to confuse the issue; to confuse it with an idea which has no relation to the problem of the citizen's financial (and moral) responsibility to his government—namely, the idea that this rent is paid for the use of land.

Would it not be more effective to face these editors, and people holding similar views, with facts it would be exceedingly difficult to disprove, facts such as the following?—That this particular kind of rent is payment made by individuals wherever they may live or work (which must be on the earth somewhere!) for benefits to be derived *only* from social and governmental aids to living and working among their fellows; benefits such as the security of their lives, the protection of the product of their labor (to the producer belongs the product!), and all other services rendered and made available *only* by government? Certainly, if the premises quoted are true axioms, this particular kind of rent cannot be payment for the use of things of which men are *not* the producers.

Misrepresentation of this particular kind of rent as being the "Rent of land" will encourage many people to insist that it is payment for the use of land which they will claim belongs to them because they hold title to it; although security of title, and of occupancy of the land itself, is at the expense of the government, and although its holder did not, as he will have to admit, produce the *land*.

It seems futile to argue, as was argued with this editor, that rent is an "unearned increment," since to get something for nothing seems to be the height of some people's ambition; who therefore are quick to ridicule this obvious contradiction in the hope of defeating anything like a "single tax that is not a *tax*" as an obstacle to their chance of getting some of this rent for themselves. Had it not been for such arguments, perhaps people would not so clearly have seen that, in certain circumstances and for a small part of the population, rent might become an unearned increment to their fortunes.

Show to these editors—*prove to them!*—and through them possibly to other people that this rent is payment for services rendered and

made available only by government and for nothing else, and the wisdom and justice of its payment in full to the government might soon cease to be questioned.

Eugene, Oregon.

W. R. B. WILLCOX.