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More About Municipal Reform.

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I SAID I WAS IN FAVOR of “municipal ownership,” but that, because nearly all the resulting benefits would go to a very small class of our citizens, I did not care much about such a reform at this time. I believe the time to be not far distant, however, when a broader and clearer recognition of economic truth will have made possible a simple means of the equitable distribution of the benefits arising from all forms of public improvement. When that time comes—when the intelligent voter may feel that the good things his suffrage brings to the community, will actually go to the community --- then it would be time to encourage many public improvements. But *now* -- why, no good thing can happen to the town but what enhances land-values; so all the people that *pay* rent have to pay *more* rent, that’s all.

In the end it’s the people who *do things* and the people who *use their capital in industrial enterprises* that have to pay (in increased rents) for any sort of improvement that comes along; and the worst of it is that these payments must go to people who *don't* do things, — at least they need not. Sometimes of course, a land owner is also a user of capital in industrial enterprises and a doer of work besides. The things he gets by earning them—either through his capital or his industry—he richly deserves; but what he gets from *increased rents* when the cause of the increase is in no way due to himself but to the growth or improvement of the community --- what flows to him merely as the *owner* of land, and not as the *user* of it—these moneys, it seems to me, are not really *his* according to *everlasting law*.

Mr. James Middleton says in *Harlequin* of last week that, in his opinion, a number of reforms must precede the *single tax*, and he urges the motion for municipal ownership and other reforms "regardless of the benefit to landlords?" He significantly adds the statement, however, that "perhaps the working out of these reforms (municipal ownership, free trade, etc.) may be necessary to bring into clear relief the evils of land monopoly."

I don’t believe it. The evils of land "monopoly" will always be obscure to those who *can't* see or *will not* see; and to those who can and are willing to know the truth, no magnification could make it plainer than it is right now. It needs only for me to say "What do I see before me?"

Mr. X is doing all he can in this waterworks investigation to injure the private corporation that for so long a time has kept up the rates and kept down the

efficiency of the present system. He wants the city to buy a plant and run its own system at an exceedingly cheap rate and with an efficient service. These are things devoutly to be wished -- and they are possible; he may succeed in his wish—but what if he does? Wouldn't cheaper water and greater convenience make this a better town to live in? Wouldn't more people want to come here to live? Wouldn't the people that do live here be gladder they were living—and living here? And so wouldn't the owner of land say, "Go to, I will draw me some more revenues from my land; I may be idle, but the people will come to town, and the more they come the more they want to pay me for doing nothing." And wouldn't it turn out, after all, that Mr. X and his people would have to pay in increased rents as much for the new city system as for the old system of the private corporation? Don't the Astors and the Vanderbilts and the handful of people that own Manhattan island take unto themselves almost all of the benefits of New York's wonderful improvement and growth? Is there not tribute to these mere *owners of the soil* in every price one pays—for car fare, for board, for lodging, for goods, for *anything* one gets on that island?

Why shouldn't the *real* owners of this *franchise*— this God-given right of the people *to live on the land and by means of it*—call it in, *reclaim it*, after the manner of that expression of the people's sovereignty called "the right of eminent domain?" Why shouldn't the "*owners of the earth*" on which New Yorkers have to live be required to relieve the people entirely of the burden of taxation on the products of their industry, by giving for public use *all of the land rent due to the growth of the city*? The houses they own are *theirs* by reason of their having builded

them, but the *island* became theirs only through a wrong of the old time that now comes up to be righted. Let them, and let all men, not be taxed for houses and things made with hands; but every man that wishes to keep for his use a piece of the earth -- *not* made with hands -- let him pay to the common fund for public purposes an amount equal in value to the special privilege he deprives his fellow-men of in holding for himself exclusively a track of earth. This amount will always be *what the bare land would rent for, without improvements on it*.

This plan would abolish only *land monopoly and speculation*. It need not be done violently or even suddenly. If land taxes were slightly increased and other taxes decreased for one year, with the avowed intention of a gradual adoption of a *single tax* on land values Mr. Middleton's fear of "dire disaster" would either be more pronounced (and cause retraction) or be entirely dissipated by the end of one year.

As to "socialism" (to which Mr. Middleton seems to refer with some favor) I will none of it. The single-taxer is a *pure individualist*, who cooperates with his fellow

men by minding his own business. Inquire of Henry George. --- The Science of Political Economy, Chap. IX.