

Contributions to Newspapers By Intelligent Single Taxers

THE editor of LAND AND FREEDOM has culled the following letters from Single Taxers which have recently appeared in newspapers throughout the country. We think our readers will be glad to see these communications which have been found acceptable for publication by discerning editors. Certainly it can be claimed for our friends that they know how to state our story and write with vigor and intelligence.

JOHN J. EGAN IN N. Y. WORLD-TELEGRAM

In his prayer the Chaplain of the Senate said, "Abate the edge of want and distress by the enrichment of our world with smiling plenty and fair, prosperous days." God has ever granted the second part of that petition through the operation of natural laws. The sun, rain and dew are ever ready to fructify the soil whenever man supplies the necessary labor and capital.

"The edge of want and distress" and the brunt of misery and poverty are caused by man-made laws. Our great transgressions are the laws which promote the monopoly of land and trade, our inequitable system of taxation and laws restricting individual freedom. The first part of that petition should have been directed to the Senate, the House of Representatives and State Legislatures.

H. V. JOHANNESON IN PHILADELPHIA LEDGER

We have nothing to indicate that we have learned anything between the time of Coxey's march and Cox's. Both stupidly marched to our political fakery to plead for help from hold-up men. One wonders how our forefathers managed to hunt and fish and till the soil when there were no supermen at Washington to give them doles or loans. I guess it somehow connects up with the punishment a professor inflicted upon his audience for an hour or more trying to explain what Spengler had written about decline of Western civilization. The professor had gone to Europe for a bulky volume to get what a now famous Philadelphian fifty years before had written in one chapter, not only much better than Spengler but more complete, in "Progress and Poverty."

Much space is being allotted to Dr. C. C. Furnas, of the Sheffield Scientific School, for his exposition on how little time we need to spend at work to make a living. But like Spengler, he has no remedy for the paradoxical fact that all our inventions have but slightly relieved labor and taken away none of the universal anxiety and dread of poverty.

Apparently our economic doctors never look about them. They never saw that if the "owner" of land can take as rent the difference between what the poorest and the best land yields, labor on land of high productivity is no better off than he who labors on the poorest. In our centers of civilization landlords receive as high as \$5,000 a year rent per front foot annually. They discount productive power. But hunger marchers and Spenglers and Furnases are oblivious to facts.

HAROLD SUDELL IN PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

In your editorial today on "The Unjust Burden on Real Estate" you say that the tax on realty should be diminished. This is one of those dangerous half truths. There is no question that the tax on homes is too high and that the community suffers because of this. But real estate is made up of two entirely different constituents—buildings and land. The value of the buildings is individually produced; the value of the land is socially made. And the effect of taxes on these two things is diametrically opposite. High taxes on buildings work evil; they make homes scarcer, dearer and harder to get. They effectively lessen employment. But high taxes on land values, since they check land speculation, make land (for use) more abundant, cheaper and

easier to get, and as land cannot be used without employing labor they materially aid in diminishing unemployment.

Taxes on buildings are excessive—yes! Any tax levied on homes is excessive, since it is both unnecessary and unwise. But, up to the point of taking the whole of the economic rent of land by taxation, the tax on land cannot be too high—the higher the better so far as the general welfare is concerned.

RAY ROBSON IN MICHIGAN STATE JOURNAL

Consider the problem as a whole. Our national income about three years ago was around 90 billion dollars annually. This is divided by natural economic law, as economists agree, among three factors—wage for labor, interest for capital, rent for land. We also know that labor received about half of the total. But we also know, or can easily learn, that the volume of production was increasing more rapidly than the volume of wages; that each year labor received about 1 per cent less of the total value of the product than of the previous year. No wonder that purchasing power shrunk, that goods began to accumulate, that production had to be restricted, and that finally so general was the restriction that only two-thirds of our potential labor supply is now employed.

Now how can we find what caused this decline in labor's share of the total value of the product? We must consider the other factors of industry. Has capital taken too much? Some think so and that if employers would only pay higher wages everything would be all right. But wait a minute. While some employers, by unusually able management or unusually favorable opportunity, have made large fortunes, it is reasonably certain that a majority of employees were only just paying expenses and that any general increase of wages would have sent thousands into bankruptcy.

Then where else can we look for the real cause of the trouble? Let us consider the third factor in industry—rent. We know, or should know, that land values have been increasing far more rapidly than either population or wages or commodity wealth; that while in the past generation wages and commodity wealth have nominally more than doubled, this is mostly due to the greater volume of money and the resulting general rise in prices. During this period the rental value of land has increased 300 or 400 per cent, amounting now to 14 or 15 billions annually, and therefore steadily reducing the share received by capital and labor.

Remember also that taxes have been rapidly increasing, amounting now to about 10 billions annually. This makes a total of 25 billions which must be paid before labor and capital can share the remainder.

What can be done to reduce this burden? Just this. Instead of taking the 10 billion taxes and the 15 billion rent from the gross income of 90 billions, we can take the taxes entirely from the rent, and thus leave 10 billions more to be spent annually by those who actually produce all wealth. Instead of a steady decrease we may then be certain of a continual increase in the purchasing power of the masses, making depressions impossible and insuring permanent prosperity.

JAMES B. ELLERY IN GLOUCESTER (MASS.) DAILY TIMES

It is said that 1930 went down in history as the year when everything did, and we can accept 1931 as the year when everything stayed down except our debts.

As to 1932, I may as well predict now that things will continue to stay down, and that depression and unemployment will still be with us, for the simple reason that neither the Republican administration, our substantial business men, our bankers, or any other such influential group is bringing forward any program that will effectively remedy the situation. For example, Mr. Hoover expresses much concern

and would do something about it. Last October, at the close of the Henry George Foundation Conference at Baltimore, a delegation of Single Taxers visited Mr. Hoover at the White House and presented to him directly a statement of facts.

It was to the effect that in this country there is between 160 and 200 billion dollars of land value and that a tax of 1 per cent on 160 billion would produce 1,600 million revenue; that a tax of 5 per cent would produce 8 billion, and that a tax of 5 per cent on 200 billion would produce 10 billion dollars of revenue.

The total taxes paid in the United States (local, State and national) are about 8,400 million dollars. Hence the above figures show that the taxation of land values only at about 5 per cent would suffice to meet all governmental expenses. Now if Mr. Hoover were really concerned about how to meet the treasury deficit and at the same time enable business to function, it would seem that the statement presented would interest him.

In his recent message to Congress, however, he has made no allusion whatever to land value as a possible or proper source of revenue, but instead urges taxes upon theatre admissions, telegrams, automobile sales, an increase of postal rates, etc., and is very tenderly hesitant about placing the burden where it properly belongs. Why? Mr. Hoover would relieve industry by increasing the burden upon it, and as a corollary would intensify unemployment rather than lessen it.

M. VAN VEEN IN NEW YORK SUN

Your "Margaret G." contributor ascribes all our ills to capitalism. He is in error. The sole cause is land monopoly, and that can be broken by taking the rent of land for all public services and abolishing every tax that now oppresses both labor and capital.

We are giving to land owners each year \$700,000,000 in our city for permission to use what God or nature provided to get your living from, and from which all wealth comes by the application of labor, and the land owners don't provide a shoestring or anything of a labor due for that vast contribution.

The great wealth of the Astors, Wendels, Rockefellers, Goelets, Rhinelanders would melt over night were society or the community to take the land rent which the population and the activities of the people produce, and run their Government with the same.

We would have no need of robbing the individual of any part of his property, which we now do by taxing his house, his income, machinery and labor products.

Margaret G., read that immortal book "Progress and Poverty," by Henry George, and socialism and communism will appear to you silly, they deny the right of the individual to select the job which is congenial to him.

"DAD" IN FLORAL PARK (L. I.) GATEWAY

Why is it that with all the improvements modern progress brings there is throughout the civilized world today suffering, destitution, anxiety and all the concomitants of poverty?

Labor-saving machinery, by its very name, implies benefits to labor. Through universal education, illiteracy is practically abolished. Religion, which softens the heart and changes the man from brutality to humanity, is as well organized for effective service as ever. Finance is able to inflate or contract currency when and wherever necessary to aid commerce. The Creator, through nature, has offered more than enough for all. Wealth has been greatly increased. The average of comfort has been raised, but all of this progress has failed to prevent poverty. This is the question that is being asked by all classes of people.

That greatest of living Americans, Nicholas Murray Butler, in an address at the 177th commencement of Columbia University, said, among other things: "Somewhere and somehow there is a gap, a point of balance, in our social, our economic and our political system which we have not found ways and means to fill and supply."

An absence of spurious and a possession of true optimism gave Dr. Butler the ability to feel that there was an answer to the above question. So in his address he referred to a book written over fifty years ago by another great American, Henry George, concerning which he said: "The years that have passed have set his economic analysis and economic teaching in due perspective, and enable us now to consider them with a just sense of their permanent importance and with regard to the soundness of their underlying principles."

The name of that book is "Progress and Poverty."

JAMES P. KOHLER IN MIAMI (FLA.) DAILY NEWS

Our railroads, now on the very edge of bankruptcy, pay one-fourth of their gross income to tax collectors. The New York Central has paid more taxes than dividends, and it must be so with the Seaboard and Florida East Coast. We keep killing the goose (business) that lays the golden eggs. And the land owner eventually suffers foreclosure because business has been killed. Reverse the tax method. Put all taxes on land values—that is, on the value, not the area, of land—and prosperity will at once return and jobs aplenty can be had without buying them.

"The land shall not be sold forever!" "The birds of the air have nests, the foxes have holes, but the son of man" (mankind) is sleeping in the park or under a track; he "has nowhere to lay his head." Of all God's creatures, the wisest, man, knows less about his natural rights than does the lowest of the animals, who buy no jobs and pay no other animal for a place to rest or to work.

It is to wonder! And to weep!

WINIFRED B. COSSETTE IN BOSTON HERALD

As the returns come in from various writers we are reminded of the saying: There went out a sower to sow . . . and some seed fell on good ground. In his recent book dealing with the period in our history, 1865-95, Lewis Mumford shows how the vitality of the new political economy has impressed him, and discusses the change in our attitude toward the land question.

He says: "Rediscovering the physiocrat's notion that all wealth comes ultimately from the land—and whoever denies this denies the solar and chemical and organic basis of life—Henry George was struck by the contrast between the free lands of California, where he had settled, and the misery that attended the individual pre-emption of the land in the East. . . . In our land and land policy, national and State, he said: 'We are giving our lands away in immense bodies, permitting, even encouraging, a comparatively few individuals to monopolize the land to which the coming millions of our people must look for their support. In a few years more the homestead law and the pre-emption law will serve but the purpose of reminding the poor man of the good time past. We shall find ourselves embarrassed by the difficulties which beset the statesmen of Europe.'"

George's awareness of the political importance of the land, and his clear perception in 1870 of dangers that were fully demonstrated by 1890, and the stir he made in the torpid political and economic thought of his day by introducing into it a vital idea—all this cannot be discounted. Henry George challenged the complacencies of bourgeois economics in terms that the bourgeois economist could partly understand. Less than fifteen years after George's "Progress and Poverty" (1879) was published, Prof. Frederick Turner pointed out some of the social and economic implications of the passing of the frontier. From this point on, any one who ignored the role of the land either in American history or in our current institutional life was guilty of convenient forgetfulness; the fact was established.

DR. JAMES HARDY DILLARD IN LOUISIANA TEACHERS' JOURNAL

It would seem evident that the State or county should not favor the holding of land out of use, but they do. They do so by laying an absurdly low assessment on such land. It may be true that the land is yielding no present revenue, but this is not the fault of the State

or county, and the owner should not be helped in holding the land out of use. If such land were assessed at even a quarter of its value there would be more chance of buying it. Even at this rate owners of un-used land would be more willing to sell. Any way to make it easier to get land would be a good move in behalf of the salvation, and against the desertion, of the open country. The method suggested would not increase the taxing of farmers but of people who are holding land that is not farmed.

We beat the air with vain words when we grow eloquent over other ways and means of keeping people in the country and having them love the country. Good schools, good roads and other improvements are all right, and we do well to push forward in such ways. But whatever we may do, the basic means for rural advancement and for assuring rural progress is more division of the land and more homes held by people in their own right.

GEORGIAN IN HAMILTON (ONT.) HERALD

The greatest and the wisest Teacher the world has known, when He wanted to make His lesson clear to the people about Him, put it in the form of a parable. It should be a good method to copy.

A certain man was very rich, being the owner of a thousand acres of land and much wealth of various kinds in addition. He also had a family of ten sons and daughters. Two or three of the eldest of these were needed as their father's helpers, and so remained on the estate and gradually became its managers. Their brothers and sisters drifted off to considerable distances, and when their father passed away leaving no written will disposing of the estate no change was made in its management. At the same time it was well known that he was no respecter of persons so far as his family was concerned, but that he loved all alike and would have wished to have all his children as well as their children share in the abundant provision he had made for them. In the meantime, however, those who were in possession had a great advantage, and as a result were becoming rich. Not only this, but they were making every effort to have themselves recognized as the exclusive owners. They even went through a form of buying and selling parts of the estate among themselves and pointed to the title deeds thus obtained as proofs of their ownership.

When this had gone on for a considerable time the absent members got together and began asking each other questions as to the righteousness of the matter. This led on to a demand being made on the usurpers for a division which would recognize the equal rights of all members of the family. At the same time this demand was made to apply only to the original inheritance and not at all to anything which was due to the labor or the enterprise of the favored few. Every effort was made by the latter to head off a discussion of the question of family rights. These included offers of "generous" treatment in the form of pensions, doles and exemptions, but eventually a rising tide of intelligent action on the part of the disinherited led to the triumph of justice, after which the whole family lived in full accord and mutual helpfulness, which all admitted could have been obtained in no other way.

This parable is a faithful picture of the human family the world over. In Canada the ten sons and daughters are ten millions; the thousand acres of land are many millions. Very many of these rely on paper titles to prove their exclusive ownership in a part of the estate provided by the beneficent All-Father for the use of all His children of every generation. No title to any kind of value is valid unless it can be traced back to its creation, and in this respect the best of these titles to a part of the earth's surface are only scraps of paper and evidences of fraud and robbery. Can a human society resting on such a basis hope or deserve to escape from the woes that afflict the so-called civilized world of today?

JOHN HARRINGTON IN OSHKOSH (WIS.) DAILY NORTHWESTERN

Now, what our statesmen should do, and what statesmen will do eventually, is to draw upon this unearned income, ground rent, for

the public needs. The urgent public need now is 10 or 12 million dollars to relieve the unemployed and the distressed in this State.

If the State Legislature will levy a surtax of one-half of 1 per cent upon all land in the State, based upon the assessment of 1931, and including buildings and improvements, such a tax to be paid immediately as nearly as may be, it will produce the necessary 10 or 12 million dollars which seems to be required. If unemployment continues, such a surtax can be repeated annually until normal conditions return.

Such a tax would not fall upon capital, labor, industry or enterprise. No capital or owners of capital would remove from the State. It would tend to encourage business revival by taking the "scare" out of enterprise. The tax would be raised without additional expense. It would tend to halt our present drift toward European landlordism. It would tend to cheapen land for the unemployed who may have taste for farming. It would tend to increase wages. It would relieve employers of the charge that they should support their unemployed labor. It would aid farmers who make their living by farming, either on their own or some other farm. In short, it would be a general blessing.

A Novel Tax Plan

THE frantic and fantastic efforts of government to find new sources of revenue, and its determination to further saddle industry with additional tax burdens on both producers and consumers, make a re-examination of the tax plan sponsored by George White, of Long Branch, N. J., timely and interesting. Mr. White called it the "Wilson Plan," because of its proposal first by Edmund Wilson, of Red Bank, N. J., former Attorney General of the State, now deceased.

The plan is simplicity itself; it is easily understood and its effects would be immediate and far-reaching in the right direction; it seems to be constitutional in New Jersey and it is likely to arouse a minimum of opposition.

The average tax rate on realty and personalty in New Jersey in 1930 was computed by the State Board of Taxation to be \$40.55 per \$1,000 (about 4%). In a few districts the tax rate was lower than \$20 per \$1,000, but in many it was in excess of \$60 per \$1,000. The Wilson Plan would limit the rate on tangible personalty to 1%, and on all improvements on, in or under lands to 2%.

This will not limit municipal budgets or reduce the power of taxing districts to finance public undertakings. Real estate improvements would still be annually taxed and so would personalty. But the general property tax under this plan would take on a new aspect.

The novelty feature of this plan is that it tends to reduce taxation on the products of labor by fixing definite low rates on them rather than by exempting them in whole or in part, leaving for the necessary elasticity of budgeting the tax rate upon land values.

The setting aside of tangible personalty into a class by itself, and arranging for a local tax for all purposes at a rate as low as 1%, comes quite close to exemption of such property altogether. The separate classification of real estate improvements and the fixing of a local tax for all purposes at 2% would give relief to the great majority of real estate owners and users, reducing the annual cost of the use of buildings or other improvements.

An excellent feature about the plan is that no matter