

John C. Lincoln Says—

TAXES are going up—which will be news to practically no one at all. How far up? Who knows—to seventy billion, eighty billion, ninety? in 1939 federal taxes amounted to around \$5,700,000,000—and the year 1939, if you remember, was not exactly conspicuous for economy in government. We have come quite a distance since that not-distant date, quite a distance indeed.

Are such crushing imposts necessary? For a certainty they are not. That statement would be true even if government affairs were managed with maximum efficiency and economy, with no single penny wasted and every disbursement a necessary one. No one in his right senses, of course, believes that such has ever been the case for one minute in all government history.

No such enormous tax bill is necessary for the simple reason that billions upon billions of new government revenue could be had by the public appropriation of the annual rental value of land. Were those billions taken for the public expense, then taxes now falling on the products of capital and labor could be scaled down by the same number of billions. And no man would be wronged. All that is necessary is that the community-created value of ground rent be taken by the community for the common expenses of the community.

By no widest stretch of the imagination can ground rent be called the product of individual effort. It cannot, then, belong of a right to individuals. What a man makes or earns belongs to him. So, too, does what somebody gives him, or what he acquires in fair trade. But he has no right to ground rent because ground rent is a value for which he is no more responsible than is any other member of the community.

Ground rent is payment for privilege. It is what individuals are willing to give for exclusive and continuous possession of sites to which special advantage has been given by government and society—government by its public services, society by its presence and activity. Now it must be evident, unless you believe the Creator plays favorites, that each member of the community has as good a claim to those superior sites as has any other member of the community. Not, to be sure, because any individual made the land constituting such sites but because the advantages pertaining to them is due to the presence and activity of all the members.

But under our present hocus-pocus system of land tenure and taxation those others who have surrendered their equal claims to the superior sites don't get the compensation. They still have to pay for government services in taxes on the products of their labor and capital. And, as is plain to be seen, when some people are not getting something to which they are entitled, it is a certainty that others are getting something to which they are not entitled.

—From the Nov. *Lincoln Letter*