

To the Editor:

The belief that the single tax will end unemployment by providing wage earners with free unused land, thus enabling some of them to become self-sustaining producers, is rather far fetched in this day and age. This might have been applicable to the time in which Henry George lived, when there was plenty of unimproved land and population was sparse, but not any more.

Times have changed. Population has greatly increased since George's times with the result that there is *very little available land to be had capable of yielding a decent living wage, that is not already in use.* What is more, it is necessary today to have expensive equipment to get the best results from the land, if competition is to be met. This is true of farm as well as mineral lands. Very few workers would have the capital to develop such lands. There is, of course, still considerable unused land, but without costly reclamation it is quite unproductive. It consists mainly of marginal mineral lands, swamps, deserts and cut-over timber land of little value. The reclamation of such land is a government job, and the land isn't going to be either free or even cheap once it is reclaimed. Very few people working for wages would be able to buy it or even improve it once it is reclaimed. Most of our farm land that is capable of yielding a decent living and much that isn't, is already in use. Ask your county farm agent if you doubt it. What is more we already have more than *enough farmers to supply, not only the present market for farm products, but a much greater future market as well.*

Nor have we overlooked our unimproved city lots held for speculation. There is a considerable amount of such land to be sure, but few if any wage earners have the capital to develop the business or industrial sites that are idle, and most of the vacant residential sites lay on the outskirts of our cities where there are neither water nor graded streets. If these lots could be had for nothing very few people could afford to develop them or would want to. It would be too expensive for them to do so. What is more they could only afford temporary employment.

The realists among our single-taxers have come to realize that the promise of free land for the masses in the civilized countries doesn't mean much. It is only an idle dream. For years

Socialists have scoffed at this proposed remedy for unemployment and have had good reasons for scoffing. The fact is, no worker of today would be satisfied with the best free land that could be made available to him by means of the taxing power. He could *do much better working for an employer on land yielding rent.*

Undoubtedly the single tax would give us much more employment but only as it would encourage greater industrial expansion on the part of those who have the capital to invest. Any reduction of the industrial tax burden and lower land costs would leave industry with more money for the expansion of the industrial plant. Such an expansion would of necessity result in a better demand for labor. If there is a further improvement in productive processes, which can be expected, this better demand should also result in giving labor higher wages. While there would likely be little if any free productive land to attract our wage earners, there should be *more and much better paying jobs in our industries to attract them.* The free productive land which once acted as a safety valve for the labor market has largely disappeared in this and other civilized countries and unless we become the victims of the atomic bomb and population is considerably reduced, there is little likelihood of it ever returning. From now on we are going to have to rely largely on science and invention (material progress) to assist us in creating more jobs and to give us higher real wages. While many of the benefits of material progress are being swallowed up by increasing rents, labor has still been able to claim some of the benefits from it, as the records show. Both wages and employment have steadily increased over the years, a fact which some single-taxers are reluctant to admit.

The forces of science and invention are ever at work to extend the *margin of cultivation* and to *increase the output of all land in use.* In doing this they *increase the opportunities for employment.* With more jobs available, labor has been in a position to demand and *secure higher wages.* Needless to say the gain to them would have been much greater if rent had been going into the public treasury where it rightfully belongs.

—DON L. THOMPSON
Spokane, Wash.