

Economic Causes of Disease*

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I was invited by friends in Cincinnati to meet this evening a small body of Singletaxers, have a little dinner and talk upon the subject dear to us all. I am surprised at the gathering. I had no idea that Singletaxers were so numerous here. I presume that my friends consider this numerous body the few referred to, and that of the many thousands of Singletaxers in Cincinnati, only these could be accommodated by the size of the hall.

I have friends here this evening with whom I have been associated more or less for twenty years, and yet never heard them say a word concerning Singletax. It is a great pleasure, at least, to know that they are Singletaxers. I have met many tonight, the knowledge of whose views on this economic subject had come very nearly escaping me. It will give me very great pleasure in the future to broach this subject when I meet them.

Part of the promise for the evening has been fulfilled by my having a very pleasant time.

Sanitation in my mind has been very closely associated with Singletax. I am a Singletaxer, I think, because my life work has been that of sanitation. Sanitation is most needed by the class of people who would be most benefited by the Singletax. That poverty was the greatest single cause of bad sanitary conditions was very early impressed upon me. If I should again go into a community, such as Cuba, or Panama,

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and were allowed to select only one sanitary measure, but were at the same time given power to choose from all sanitary measures, I would select that of doubling wages. This, in my case, is not altogether theory. In our tropical possessions, in Cuba, Porto Rico, the Philippines, Panama, the result has always come about that we have largely increased wages; the result has also come about that in all these cases we have greatly improved sanitation. At Panama, the Commission found that in order to attract labor, and keep it on the Zone, they had to increase and, within a very few months, double the wages of the manual laborer. It does not take more than a moment of thought to show to you how such a measure acts and reacts. Results take place in many directions, but particularly with regard to increasing the ability of the people to live well and get better food and better clothing. While dwelling upon thoughts such as these, I came across "Progress and Poverty." I was greatly impressed by the theory and was soon convinced that the Singletax would be the means of bringing about the sanitary conditions I so much desired, and was striving for. It was impressed upon me in a concrete form everywhere, in the United States, in the tropics and particularly in Panama: the great benefit that some such scheme of taxation would confer upon sanitation.

In a city, such as Panama or Havana, the vacant lots and unimproved neighborhood were

the localities which always gave us most sanitary trouble. I was soon convinced that if any scheme were brought about whereby it would be disadvantageous for speculators to hold vacant places out of use, this scheme would be of the greatest value for sanitation. It was not possible to effect this change in method of taxation in the cities referred to. I discussed this method of taxation a good deal with the officials of Panama, urging upon them the desirability of a tax levy of this kind to cover expenditures brought about by the sanitary work. I finally got the Panama authorities around to the point of seeing the justice and advisability of such methods, but the organic law would have to be changed and this always takes time. I hope that something of the kind may yet come about in Panama.

The real scope of tropical sanitation which has been almost entirely developed within the last fifteen or twenty years, I believe, will extend far beyond our work at Panama. Everywhere in the tropics, to which the United States has gone in the past fifteen years, it has been shown that the white man can live and exist in good health. This has occurred in the Philippines, in Cuba and in Panama, but the demonstration has been most prominent and spectacular at Panama, and therefore has attracted there the greatest world-wide attention. Here among our large force of laborers we had for ten years some ten thousand Americans, men, women and children. Most of the American men did hard manual labor, exposed to the sun, rain and weather conditions day in and day out, yet during that time their health remained perfectly good, just as good as if they were working at home. The same remark as to health would apply to the four thousand women and children who lived at Panama with their husbands and fathers. Both the women and children remained in as good condition as they would have been had they lived in the United States. This condition at Panama, I think, will be generally received as a demonstration that the white man can live and thrive in the tropics. The amount of wealth which can be produced in the tropics for a given amount of labor is so much larger than that which can be produced in the temperate zone by the same amount of labor that the attraction for the white man to emigrate

to the tropics will be very great, when it is appreciated that he can be made safe as to his health conditions at a small expense. When the great valleys of the Amazon and of the Congo are occupied by a white population more food will be produced in these regions than is now produced in all the rest of the inhabited world.

But unless we can so change our economic laws, that this wealth will be more fairly distributed than it is now by the races occupying the temperate zone, mankind will not be greatly benefited. I hope and believe that ere this change in population comes about the Singletax will have caused such changes in our economic condition that wealth will be fairly distributed. I mean by fair distribution that condition in which each man gets exactly what he produces—no more, no less. This is all we Singletaxers ask. We do not wish any man to have a dollar more wealth than he himself has produced, or to take from any other man a dollar of the wealth that this other man has produced. We look forward to this time as not being so very far off, and when such time arrives, we believe that poverty will be abolished from this world, except in so far as there will always be some lazy individuals who will not work and who do not care to produce. But this number will not be so large as to affect the general principles just enunciated.

I have been invited this evening to meet a body of Singletax friends. My thoughts have naturally run on Singletax lines. I have spent the afternoon in going through your new municipal hospital. I have been greatly impressed and think I have seen about the best arranged hospital that I have ever been shown. I was also told that the city of Cincinnati was to have control of and was to finance the medical school in connection with the hospital. This seemed to me most desirable and advantageous for all parties concerned. Thinking in Singletax lines, it occurred to me that when revenues were generally raised under Singletax principles, every municipality could afford to have just such a beautiful hospital as the one I was seeing. I could foresee something of the kind for Panama; even now Panama could afford such a hospital, if its revenues were raised by Singletax methods.