

EVERYMAN

For Equal Rights to the Use of the Earth, No Privilege, and the Public Ownership of Land Rent and Natural Resources

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Class Dominance or Single Tax

IS war over, or has it only just begun? Well, constitutional war is for the moment ended—and the world swings, at last, between “lower” and “upper” class dominance.

For many centuries the Privileged class alone has ruled—save in the new territories before the idle lands became owned. It seems only natural that in Europe at least, the under dog should have his turn at dominating, before the day of no dominance could begin.

True, the dominance of Privilege has rested on the connivance and assent of the unprivileged, at first because Privilege was superstitiously revered, then because most of the unprivileged hugged the hope of gaining each some degree of privilege for himself—some adventitious aid to the favorable notice of his neighbors—and latterly because we have not known how to unseat Privilege.

So Privilege has ruled the modern world, until this war came to break old ties, sunder stale customs, generate new values—and now perhaps its rule is ending. A hundred and eighty million people seem to have cast it off, and a hundred million more are in the active process of doing so—whether for little or long, who can hazard? If “for keeps” then the war has been worth while. The “peace” that preceded it was not so lovely as a stranger might think from some people’s talk.

One need be only a little observant to guess that while the legal and constitutional war is over, the world’s real war is just breaking, the war against Privilege! This should be a bloodless war, and might be in this nation at least, if those comparatively few who perceive that the true line of social unfoldment is away from all class dominance, arouse themselves to some great united Action to exemplify to the world the theory of Freedom, the mere denial to all of any privilege, and first of all the privilege

to own unused land and take rent from those who work and live on the used land—the privilege of the Fee Simple title to earth!

There is a fair hope, with all our tools of political democracy, that thru the single tax this fundamental privilege could be revoked, the class war halted, mellowed—the world saved oceans of foolish, brutish, needless blood and violence.

War comes because a few people own most of the means of subsistence; because the natural opportunities for self-employment, the chances of making a living from the raw earth, are privately owned and monopolized; because the unused accessible land and resources are fenced in with paper titles, so that the new-comer on earth can only stay here on sufferance of rent, interest, high prices, low wages, toll in some form amounting to the lion’s share of his natural earnings; because the huge fortunes and profits are due to the misappropriation of land values artificially created by density of population—the earth being closed to the people they crowd into cities and compete for house room, food, jobs, and in business, the bulk of their earnings going to the land lords and money lords; because society is so organized (on land monopoly) that a Junker caste of rich property owners, brokers, and speculators, is automatically and inevitably produced—and this Junker caste, every once in so often, finds that the only way its “fee simple” titles can be maintained is by engaging the people in international warfare; finds that war is their only escape from revolution.

The Fee Simple is the complete, absolute title to as much land as one can procure, without regard to what use he makes of it; and to all its proceeds, earnings, increments, without regard to whether they are natural deposits, community needs, or who produces them.

While the Fee Simple remains war will be

the way of things—battalions of human beings will be trained to kill each other; whether to uphold advancing democratic ideals, as in the case of the United States; whether to protect from invasion, as in the case of the European allies; or as Germany to strengthen militarism and extend the area and influence of the Junker caste, which rests on the Fee Simple.

The economic and social life of modern christendom is based on the Fee Simple, or "freehold estate" in land—and the history of christendom is a record of increasing warfare. War will not cease while the Fee Simple remains. Without recourse, it produces a basic social antagonism which Leagues (and leagues) of Nations will not cure.

There is nothing sacred or eternal about the Fee Simple. It originated under feudalism. When the Norman came to England—

The land inhabited by the community belonged to the village as a whole. To each household a permanent portion was set out for their dwelling place and curtilage, and the arable land was distributed among the households periodically or wherever the necessity for distribution might arise. The lands unfit for tillage were enjoyed by all in common for pasturage and supplies of wood, stone, or other materials for building purposes and fuel.

The introduction of the feudal system gradually changed the village communities into feudal manors, in which the title to the land and the political supremacy were vested in a feudal lord, the villagers became his free or serf tenants, the best portion of the land was held as his domain, and the common portion was known as the lord's waste.—(Robinson's Elementary Law.)

Single tax is the natural and orderly way of revoking the Fee Simple, but there is no inevitable drift that way. The unmistakable drift is toward increasing class dominance—of the proletariat in Russia, of the predatory class in the United States; of Marxian class rule, or of Wall street paternalism. It is more than a tendency—we are leaping.

Here I pause to register an individual preference for proletariat dominance, so long as one class must coerce the others. If it is necessary

The wave of labor revolt, which began in Russia, and is now rolling over Austria and Germany, is a movement that will not be stopped by any barriers of mountain or sea, it will spread wherever the human heart protests against servitude. It will roll over England, France and Italy as soon as peace is proclaimed, possibly before that; within a year or two it will be the only problem with which the masters of America are concerned.

You have been given plenty and leisure, a chance to look about you and to think. Have you in yourself the possibility of unselfish idealism, of consecration to public welfare? If so, prove it in this fearful crisis—that there may be one part of the world in which the horrors of international strife are not succeeded by the horrors of class strife.

Can you, masters and owners of America, bring yourselves to abdicate your thrones, and consent to the orderly establishment of industrial democracy? Will you consent to the cancelling of the paper titles whereby you lay claim to the proceeds of the people's labor? Will you permit the state to tax away your unearned fortunes, and take over the industries of the country, turning its energies to the task of making plenty for all? Make up your minds and give your answer—give it in some plain way, which labor can understand; and give it quickly, before so

for either the workers or the idlers, the producers or the mere absorbers, to coerce and oppress the social body, my vote is for the workers. Moreover, it is the purpose of working-class dominance to abolish social castes, while the aim of paternalism is to strengthen and perpetuate them.

Political democracy is only an empty shell (but for the hopefulness of it led by a Woodrow Wilson) so long as economic class distinctions remain.

The single tax way is the true way out of class rule. By denying to any class the power of monopolizing the natural opportunities and resources it provides the only discernable foundation upon which can be reared the true fraternal socialism which means greater individual freedom and the end of classes.

There is no such tendency at present—not to any marked or hopeful extent—tho there are several hundred thousand active, thoughtful, broadly sympathetic persons in the United States (and other groups in other parts of the world) who understand the harmonious line of social progress pointed out by Henry George, and whose now scattered energies could be focussed into a movement that would materially affect the social drift and keep back from these shores the ascending waves of paternalism and of class dominance.

These are antagonistic waves, of course, and inevitably they must clash. They are clashing now in Russia, Austria, Germany, in the greater part of Europe. It is the beginning of the real Armageddon, of the world war for the unseating of that tyrant of tyrants, the autocrat of all autocrats, King Hunger. With the winning of political freedom the war for economic freedom—freedom from hunger and its fear in a world of plenty!—has begun.

Upton Sinclair is the clearest visioned prophet I know. If he is right, and he has been right about other futurities of equal magnitude, there is no time to lose. This is the world's hour of Action and the wave of change will run its course. Sinclair vividly writes:

the world in which the horrors of international strife are not succeeded by the horrors of class strife.

Can you, masters and owners of America, bring yourselves to abdicate your thrones, and consent to the orderly establishment of industrial democracy? Will you consent to the cancelling of the paper titles whereby you lay claim to the proceeds of the people's labor? Will you permit the state to tax away your unearned fortunes, and take over the industries of the country, turning its energies to the task of making plenty for all? Make up your minds and give your answer—give it in some plain way, which labor can understand; and give it quickly, before so much blood has been shed in the class-war that compromise and truce are no longer attainable!—UPTON SINCLAIR'S *Magazine for December 1918*.
