



EVERYMAN

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What mortal makes or adds an inch of land?
O'er earth let him alone stretch forth the hand
Of lustful ownership—and sun and air
And destiny and even life command!

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IMPORTANCE OF THE LAND ISSUE

WHILE to abolish the entire system of farming, trading, and manufacturing for private profit and replace it with an ideal industrial system of production and distribution for welfare instead of profit—while such may or may not be a desirable end toward which to work, there is nothing at present to indicate the possibility of attaining it in this country within the life time of this generation.

And if this is true, then there is no revolutionary party, and no party of economic or industrial reform, now offering any program of fundamental measures for the immediate and substantial relief of the masses from the inhuman greeds and strifes of today, with their billionaires, paupers, child labor, slums, tenement life, disemployment, high prices, wage slavery, and the discouragement of industry by the imposition of heavy taxes on production and business enterprise.

This is not in criticism of the Socialist party—or of any party. It is merely the statement of a fact based on the simplest and most obvious rule of economic procedure. Which rule is: That any advantage, short of the total abolition of the profit system; any advantage such as cheap gas or water gained by municipal ownership, high wages secured by direct action or by special legislation, better transportation facilities, sanitary housing and city betterment work generally—all these and all other advantages will accrue only to the landlords, will be added to rent, will be confiscated by the absorbers of the unearned increment, will enable commodity prices to rise still higher, will here and there change the personnel of rich and poor by some lucky or unlucky chance, but will in no wise relieve the distress and poverty of the masses.

The owners of land (10 per cent of the population, I believe, or at any rate a very small proportion)—the owners of the land are in absolute control of the economic and industrial situation, and have the power to dictate, and do dictate (albeit in very subtle and complex ways) the terms upon which every industry and every person shall occupy the land.

The industrial scheme of civilization is very intricate; nevertheless thru all its labyrinthine mazes a few fundamental truths stand out clearly and boldly for all to see who care to see them. And of these bald facts the first and most important is that whatever part of a society owns the land that part has the power of life and death over all the rest of society. For the first—as the last—requisite of man is the land. Having the land he can get whatever else he may want and have the wisdom and strength to take, but without land he has no power to take anything—or, Supposing he should acquire power to take over all the industries

before he gained the land, what would he do with them? Even airships, day dreams, and poetry come from the land, and can only exist upon sufferance of those who own the land.

Manifestly every human being should have a foothold, or its equivalent, on the land without let or hindrance from any other human being, for whoever has power to estop another from the land over him has the power of master to slave. Manifestly every person in a decently organized society must have a home, a workshop, a farm (or its equivalent as he may please) on accessible, nearby land—of which there always was, everywhere is, and forever will be in a sane universe an abundance to supply the normal requirements of whatever population may any where assemble. But since the land is of limited area, manifestly no one should be permitted to monopolize, hold idle and vacant, a single foot of land so long as any are landless, or to the detriment of anyone, causing him to travel over miles and miles of idle, vacant, unused land in order to reach, far in the wilderness away from his kin and the refining influences of urban life, a piece of land upon which he may freely live.

Manifestly land monopoly spells slavery and there can be no freedom till all have access to the land. Communism or Socialism may or may not come in the future, as future generations may elect, but first of all there must be—Individual Occupancy of the Land.

We have not now a system of private ownership in land (or of anything else scarcely). What we have now is a system of Land Monopoly—a very few people monopolize the land and are thus enabled to monopolize about everything else.

The land monopoly proceeds as to acreage first and when this is all fenced in by monopoly titles, then the Value of the Land in and near cities is found to have increased, and this land value which is created by all the people alike and is nothing more than Population Value—a value created entirely by the density of population—is appropriated by a few private individuals. This population value now is of almost inestimable enormity—and it goes into a few Private Pockets!

It is called the Unearned Increment.

Is there the shadow of doubt in the minds of fair and humane persons, that this unearned increment should go to the people who create it—the Whole People? And is there any doubt that if it went to the whole people it would prevent dire poverty, relieve acute distress, cure wage slavery and disemployment, and abolish child slavery? To answer that question in the negative is to ignore the simplest and most firmly established facts of political economy.

How shall it be got to the whole people?

By inauguration of the Single Tax on land values. No other method has ever been suggested or even dreamed of; there is no other way. Single Tax in its simplest form is as absolute as arithmetic.

By Single Tax is meant the abolition of all other taxes except that on the bare selling value of the naked land, and the imposition of this tax to the full extent of the value. That is Single Tax, unlimited.

It is not at all likely that the entire nation, or any sufficient part of it, can quickly be taught to see so simple and fundamental a truth; therefore Single-taxers are not sanguine of being able to apply immediately their entire remedy in all its beautiful and harmless simplicity. And indeed many devout Single-taxers are indisposed to advocate the full remedy at once.

But this glaring fact is true of Single Tax, as it is of no other revolutionary or reform program—that even its moderate application in its mildest form

brings immediate, actual, and lasting relief to the whole people who need it most—and this relief neither monopoly prices nor rent can take from them.

The immediate revocation of all laws providing for the assessment of buildings and of personal property, as the first step toward Single Tax, will work hardship to no one engaged in legitimate business, and will give ample time and notice for the capital now engrossed in speculation to reinvest in productive and useful enterprises.

Even so mild a measure of relief as this could not be accomplished in less than several years, since doubtless Monopoly and Speculation will fight it to the last ditch thru the last court. But if the people want it they can have it; they always do have what they want, what corresponds to their superstition or to their enlightenment, and there is no power to keep it from them. The public is blind, stupid, and narrowly selfish mostly; its voice is the voice of ignorance and passion. Yet such as it is every member of it is bound by its verdict, and the only hope for the present or the future lies in raising the mass intelligence to the point where it shall no longer be swayed and molded by Monopoly and Greed.

As soon as the people have wisdom enough merely to take the taxes off industry and place them on monopoly and speculation, industrial conditions will be permanently bettered. In and near the cities building operations will steadily and enormously increase, since the holders of vacant sites will be forced to build on them in order to get a sufficient revenue to be able to hold them.

This increased building will raise wages in a natural manner, as when two jobs seek one man instead of a dozen men competing for one job. Wages will go up, normally and permanently.

And rent will go down. Rent will go down to a fair and normal interest on the capital actually invested. Tenants will no longer be required to pay rent equal to the interest on advancing ground values.

Twenty years ago Jones bought a lot on Broadway for \$20,000. Now it is worth \$200,000—\$180,000 of Unearned Increment. Whatever the cost of his building, he adds that \$180,000 of Unearned Increment to his "capital invested" and the tenants who rent from him have to pay interest on the entire amount. That's what makes rent so high—and the landlord complains that he is "earning" only a few per cent on his "investment"—on the people's investment he means, for it is population alone, the Whole People of a community, that created the \$180,000 increase now charged up in rent. Under Single Tax rent will go down—way down till a fair interest on the actual capital invested is reached.

This will not happen drastically, suddenly, to the disruption or the disorganization of the social status. But gradually and surely—to the enrichment of the whole people and to the final utter routing of the multi-millionaire. Both he and the pauper must go. They will go peaceably and kindly—or they will go by sabotage and syndicalism. Humanity cannot and will not wait for the far-off establishment of the Socialistic state. It can come afterward, if the people want it, and when they want it. Evidently a sufficient number of the people do not now want it. Whether I, or you, ever will want it is of no consequence. Here and now we are looking at things as they are. Pretty rotten, they are—monopoly, speculation, and special privilege gone mad!

And Single Tax is the only thing that can give immediate and substantial relief. All the plundering interests know this, if their victims the people, don't. These interests (monopoly, speculation, and special privilege) fear Single Tax above all other "reforms," because they understand it. They rely upon their

courts backed by the army to suppress Syndicalism and the general strike, while Socialism they have ceased to fear because its only danger to them and its only relief to the people lie in the remote future when its party shall be strong enough to take over the whole government—a doubtful contingency, at present.

But Single Tax they fear today and tomorrow and are spending vast sums to urge the voters from its adoption.

Single Tax does not oppose Socialism, or Syndicalism, or any plan for human betterment, or any scheme for a more harmonious social and industrial life. It merely says to distressed humanity:

“I will restore to the people their lands, their mines, their highways, railroads, water rights and waterways. I will restore to the people the land values which they alone have created in and near the cities. I will restore to the people all that monopoly, speculation, and special privilege now take from them. I will fix the public values in the public name, vest the fundamental public interests permanently in their rightful owners, making possible the private ownership of all land and making forever impossible the monopoly of land.”

Strange that all sincere social reformers and revolutionists cannot unite in so simple and straightforward a program! It binds them to no future course, bars the way to no greater betterment, hinders no further step toward larger ends—does not claim to be final, but it is—IS—fundamental! And it brings substantial relief at once.

Perhaps this is why some oppose it, fearing that relief and a measure of social betterment will make the mass content short of the full cup. But this is false reasoning. The course of human development disproves it. Those who have nothing are the last to agitate for better conditions. Human ambition feeds on success; sickens and despairs on failure. Human needs increase as they are fed. The more men have the more they want; the more they have the more courage is theirs to demand still more. Living men will never be satisfied. The satisfied man, at either end of the social scale, is a dead one. Single Tax will abolish poverty and bring a measurable degree of leisure and a greater mass intelligence. Only intelligent people are fit for a better social scheme than now obtains. Efforts to enforce Utopia on an unintelligent people are futile and illogical.

Here in California we are on the the threshold of entering the Single Tax wedge. The last legislature submitted to popular vote, at the general election in the fall of 1914, a constitutional amendment enabling any city or county in the state to eliminate all taxation on buildings, improvements, and personal property other than franchises, which means, of course, the power to raise all revenues by assessing land values—instead of industry. It is only an enabling act, but a necessary step toward the inauguration of Single Tax, limited or unlimited, as the people at future elections may decide. All the predatory interests of the state are combining to defeat this initial step, and probably half a million dollars or more will be spent to “educate” the farmer to vote against it. They will lie to him and to the home owner, telling that Single Tax would rob them of farm and home; and all their harlots of the daily press will shout “anarchy!” It is always “anarchy and chaos” that threatens Monopoly—and always the cry of “law and order” that gains Monopoly another advantage. “Bunk” is current coin in America and for meaningless phrases the people yield their land, their earnings, their children, themselves.

Luke North.