

AN ALTERNATIVE OUTLOOK

By Everett W. Gross

I have just returned from Colorado where I attended a meeting of the Intermountain Single-Tax Association. I had wangled the invitation by claiming residence between the Rockies and the Appalachians. And if that wouldn't do, I could claim that a small fraction of my State lies between Scottsbluff and the Pine Ridge. That makes it Intermountain.

Joking aside, what really qualifies me to be a member is that I am willing to be a member. We accept everyone we can get. In fact, we will even accept anyone who might disagree with us. It would save us a lot of bother for the rest of our lives if they could find a flaw in our reasoning.

Some of our members object to the name "Single-Tax" since it is not an accurate complete description. (Since a tax on bare-land speculation is not a tax at all, how can it be called a Single-Tax?) Shucks!! Right now, I can't think of any organization with a short name which is completely descriptive. Not even my Church qualifies.

In common with all other people who believe they have a message needing to be told, single-taxers are in search of expressions which might help to illustrate how we think of the world as it is, compared to how we believe it ought to be.

Humankind cannot live on the Earth without improvements. The more improvements that you or Joe or Moe might build, the better the world is for me and everyone else to live on. The mutual use we make of each other's improvements is part of the gains we all make from what we call the division of labor.

An expression used at our Colorado meeting caught the fancy of someone and yielded the suggestion that it be published in our house organ. The expression was: "Double-barreled scorched-Earth tax policy." It seemed to be a fair description of a major result of most of the system of taxes and subsidies currently in use in most of the world.

The tendency to increase the tax burden upon any improver in proportion to his improvement is one of the gun barrels that tend to cause a scorched Earth. It inhibits improvement.

The other barrel is our tendency to feel that we must not burden the non-improver with taxes.

The usual argument in support of the second barrel is that he is not making money and therefore should not have to pay. The single-taxers, however, know perfectly well that if the owner did not at least believe that he were making money holding land idle, he would not hold it idle.

The result of using such a double-barreled gun is that the whole Earth is held in a lowered state of improvement compared to what it should be. The reduced improvements result in an over-all reduced habitability of the Earth for everyone.

While the community cries about needing new revenue sources, here is at least a third of the most valuable land held idle or nearly idle for speculation right under our noses. I happen to be one who speculates in bare land, but you and I would both be better off if I could build on it.