

Says Mr. Matteson Erred

Your contributor, Mr. A. C. Matteson, Jr., (Freeman, September, 1942) makes the statement that the United Committee in England advocated "a penny in the pound" as a slogan "calculated to dispel uneasiness among middle-class listeners." In this he is doubly in error—by the inference that the Committee limited its aim to partial measures, and by the imputation that this has been done to conciliate the interests and not only allay their fears but also assure them that the agitation would end with the passing of the partial measure. Correction of such misrepresentation is very necessary.

The object of the United Committee for Taxation of Land Values and of the International Union is "to promote economic freedom and social justice by publishing, advocating and maintaining the principles and policy of Land Value Taxation and Free Trade as expounded by Henry George." These principles mean that the whole value of land, apart from improvements, belongs to the public and that the right to the use of land and the equal freedom to produce and exchange wealth are to be achieved by making economic rent public revenue, and abolishing taxation on the processes and results of industry. The way to achieve this is to concentrate taxation on the value of land. That is the practical method Henry George recommended (Progress and Poverty, Book VIII) as a practical statesman; and that is the policy to which the united British Henry George movement is dedicated, never abating but always upholding the full principle in its every declaration, manifesto, leaflet or other publications.

It is to be remembered that the advocacy of Henry George's ideas has been so successful in Great Britain that on several occasions bills for enacting some measure of land value taxation either for national or local purposes have been introduced by Liberal or Labour Governments. These bills were not introduced or drafted by followers of Henry George, and they were undoubtedly imperfect in certain respects, and for that reason were faithfully explained and criticized by us. Nevertheless the mere fact of such legislation being proposed by the Government of the day did direct public opinion still more to the ideas of Henry George. It made them the subject of popular discussion on thousands of public platforms.

Should the Henry George movement, presented with such an opportunity for gaining the attention of the public, have stood aside from the controversy and said

to the contestants: "A plague on both your houses"? Such an attitude no doubt would have been agreeable to the vested interests. A very few of our friends did adopt the attitude of all or nothing; unless they could have the whole economic rent paid into the treasury at one blow, they were not interested in any practical step. The movement as a whole seized upon the opportunity to make the principles of Henry George known when the public ear was attuned to hear.

We are still working for the realization in practice of a principle of great importance. In a democracy its realization must be by democratic methods through public discussion and the education of public opinion. This education it is our duty to promote with all the resources at our command and at all times. But when the inviting occasion for public debate is afforded by the action the Government itself takes, it is not a question of advocating, much less insisting upon, any "step-by-step" procedure. It is the chance given for expounding the principles involved in the legislative step that is proposed, thereby advertising all the more convincingly the case for the total abrogation of the land monopoly and the elimination of all private appropriation of land values. The free trade cause provides a historic parallel, prompting one to ask whether this country would have moved from protection to free trade if the free traders had objected to every reduction in the tariffs as being useless unless all items were abolished simultaneously? These are issues which confront men in practical life. It may be left to the student in his cloister to ignore them.

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the Taxation of Land
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