

Intermountain Frontier

INTERMOUNTAIN FRONTIER

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PRIVATE PROPERTY IN LAND

At the recent ISTA conference, a participant asked a cogent and disturbing question.

He said that in the single tax movement, he occasionally runs into expressions by writers or speakers that seem to suggest a desire to upset the institution of private property in land, perhaps to encourage government nationalization of the land.

Ever since Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* (1880), and possibly before that, the physiocratic movement has been plagued by this question. Unfortunately, some writings by physiocratic exponents, including George himself, lend themselves to an interpretation that they themselves never intended. On this, one may consult G.B. Burrman, "Henry George and the Institution of Private Property in Land," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, XCV, 4 (October, 1986), p. 489.

Nothing, even including Marxist communism, could impose a greater tyranny. By the very terms of modern-day physiocracy, the earth is considered to be the only source there is of wealth and power, and its monopolization by government or by any other institution would introduce the very antithesis of the freedom, equality and justice that are sought by the proponents of the single tax.

You don't "own" something if you cannot use it fully; and you cannot use land if you are penalized for doing so. Thus, the taxation of land values, combined with removal of taxes on improvements and other efforts of labor and capital, stimulate and strengthen the ownership of land, not the contrary. By ending monopolization of land, including the holding of land out of use for parasitic speculative purposes, these measures would multiply the numbers of land owners. On this, see our reprint on "California Land Reform, 1909," in this issue.

On this point, we take a central quotation from Henry George: "The equal right of all

men to the use of land is as clear as their equal right to breathe the air—it is a right proclaimed by the fact of their existence. For we cannot suppose that some men have a right to be in this world and others no right."--Progress and Poverty, p. 338.

We do not now and never will favor any plan that would jeopardize the institution of private property in land or would put any institution, such as government, into ownership of a large proportion of the land. We oppose all measures that would strangle humanity in the tentacles of implacable tyranny.

That is why, to again quote from George, we propose "To abolish all taxation save that upon land values."