

Land and Freedom

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Comment and Reflection

THERE are certain misconceptions into which some of our Single Tax friends fall occasionally and quite unconsciously. Ground rent is sometimes referred to as a "burden," or as "something to be avoided." Instead of being a burden it is a blessing, as natural and inevitable as the air we breathe. Ground rent is a normal provision for meeting current expenses of government and is created by the services of government and the social activities of the community.

GROUND rent (all of it) is the annual and compensating value of land, resulting from public expenditures. A high ground rent is payment for public services and social advantages created by the community. As such it is an equitable exchange if the payment is a 100 per cent *quid pro quo*. It is the diversion of part of this rent into private hands that is the menace, not ground rent itself. Because we have not collected the ground rent resulting from public services, taxes on industry are imposed in lieu of the just payment of ground rent. It is this procedure that has got us into the mess we are in.

SPECULATION in land, pressing the economic rent above the normal and extracting an abnormal increase in anticipation of future yield, *does* impose a burden upon industry. But this is quite another matter. No one has discussed this aspect of our problem more illuminatingly than LeBaron Goeller. The sale price of land, in including both the real and speculative rent over a period of years, interposes a barrier to immediate production, and shows the necessity of assessing the economic rent rather than the value of land, which is the capitalization of that part of rent remaining in private hands.

WE have used the term *just* payment. We would stress the *justice* of the remedy as George has done. It is well enough to indicate the scientific nature of the laws of political economy. But these are not like the laws of astronomy and chemistry. Economic laws are moral laws. They pertain to the actions of men in a free society where the economic law and the moral law are one. Henry George entitled one of his addresses,

"Justice the End, Taxation the Means." It is this aspect of the question that is most important. Our appeal is to the moral sense of mankind, to its sense of justice. To the failure to realize the importance of this is due the futility of the appeals to individual taxpayers that our proposal would save them thirteen dollars and twelve cents on their tax bills. Most of these appeals have fallen flat, for men are not to be moved by such considerations, despite opinions to the contrary.

WE have called "Progress and Poverty" "The Book of a Thousand Years." In pointing the way out of the long martyrdom of man no other existing medium can take its place. Its followers boast (and with reason) that Henry George has never been convicted of any serious error, that the great structure of reason that he erected remains uninjured by any attacks made upon it since it was given to the world.

IN the meantime many attempts have been made by those not unfriendly to the collection of the economic rent in lieu of taxes who seek to defend it by premises of their own, differing from those of Mr. George, though leading to the same general conclusion. Just how much of this is due to the fact that these writers are enamoured of their own subtleties, and just how much to a reasonable desire to translate into what they imagine is a more current and exact vernacular the incomparable reasoning, and equally incomparable language of the master, must be left to them.

BUT whatever is the animating motive of these books that seek to supplant the message of Henry George with their own interpretations, they do no particular harm. Those who follow the main contentions of Henry George yet seek some substitution of their own may do effective work. In this class Louis Wallis, whose book, "The Burning Question," is finding hospitable reception, is accomplishing much. Mr. Wallis differs from Henry George in somethings that are not really important, but this has not induced him to abandon any of the main principles. No one is doing a more far reaching work to advance our principles. He is not influenced by his vanity to substitute some economic credo all his own. He frankly avows the source of his inspiration and does