

THE SINGLE-TAX COURIER.

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THE SINGLE-TAX

WHAT IT IS, AND WHY WE URGE IT.

Fundamental Principles as Stated by Henry George in Financial Reform Almanac.

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I shall briefly state the fundamental principles of what we who advocate it call the single-tax.

We propose to abolish all taxes save one single-tax levied on the value of land, irrespective of the value of improvements in or on it.

What we propose is not a tax on real estate, for real estate includes improvements. Nor is it a tax on land, for we would not tax all land, but only land having a value irrespective of its improvements, and would tax that in proportion to that value.

Our plan involves the imposition of no new tax, since we already tax land values in taxing real estate. To carry it out we have only to abolish all taxes save the tax on real estate, and to abolish all that which now falls on buildings or improvements, leaving only that part of it which now falls on the value of the bare land. This we would increase so as to take as nearly as may be the whole of the economic rent, or what is sometimes styled the "unearned increment of land values."

That the value of the land alone would suffice to provide all needed public revenues - municipal, county and national - there is no doubt.

To show briefly why we urge this change, let me treat (1) of its

expediency, and (2) of its justice.

I.

From the single-tax we may expect these advantages:

1. It would dispense with the whole army of taxgatherers and other officials which present taxes require, and place in the treasury a much larger proportion of what is taken from the people, while, by making government simpler and cheaper, it would tend to make it purer. It would get rid of taxes which necessarily promote fraud, perjury, bribery and corruption, which lead men into temptation, and which tax what the nation can least afford to spare - honesty and conscience. Since land lies out of doors and cannot be removed, and its value is the most readily ascertained of all values, the tax to which we would resort can be collected with the minimum of cost and the least strain on public morals.

2. It would enormously increase the production of wealth -

A. By the removal of the burdens that now weigh upon industry and thrift. If we tax houses, there will be fewer and poorer houses; if we tax machinery, there will be less machinery; if we tax trade, there will be less trade; if we tax capital, there will be less capital; if we tax savings there will be less savings. All the taxes, therefore, that we would abolish are taxes that repress industry and lessen wealth. But if we tax land values, there will be no less land.

B. On the contrary, the taxation of land values has the effect of making land more easily available by industry, since it makes it more difficult for owners of valuable land, which they themselves do not care to use, to hold it idle for a larger future price. While the abolition of taxes on labor and the products of labor would free the

the active element of production, the taking of land values in taxation would free the passive element by destroying speculative land values, and preventing the holding out of use of land needed for use. If anyone will but look around to-day and see the unused or but half used land, the idle labor, the unemployed or poorly employed capital, he will get some idea of how enormous would be the production of wealth were all the forces of production free to engage.

C. The taxation of the processes and products of labor on the one hand, and the insufficient taxation of land values on the other, produces an unjust distribution of wealth, which is building up in the hands of a few, fortunes more monstrous than the world has ever before seen, while the masses of our people are steadily becoming poorer. These taxes necessarily fall on the ^{poor} more heavily than on the rich; by increasing prices, they necessitate larger capital in all businesses, and consequently give an advantage to large capitals; and they give, and in some cases are designed to give, special advantages and monopolies to combinations and trusts. On the other hand, the insufficient taxation of land values enables men to make large fortunes by land speculations and the increase in ground values & fortunes which do not represent any addition by them to the general wealth of the community, but merely the appropriation by some of what the labor of others create.

This unjust distribution of wealth develops on the one hand a class idle and wasteful because they are too rich, and on the other hand a class idle and wasteful because they are too poor - it deprives men of capital and opportunities which would make them more efficient producers. It thus greatly diminishes production.

D. The unjust distribution which is giving us the hundred-fold millionaire on the one side and the tramp and pauper on the other, generates thieves, gamblers, social parasites of all kinds, and requires large expenditures of money and energy in watchmen, policemen, courts, prisons and other means of defense and repression. It kindles a greed of gain and a worship of wealth, and produces a bitter struggle for existence which fosters drunkenness, increases insanity and causes men whose energies ought to be devoted to honest production to spend their time and strength in cheating and grabbing from each other. Besides the moral loss, all this involves an enormous economic loss which the single-tax would save.

E. The taxes we would abolish fall most heavily on the poorer agricultural districts, and thus tend to drive population and wealth from them to the great cities. The tax we would increase would destroy that monopoly of land which is the great cause of that distribution of population which is crowding people too closely together in some places and scattering them too far apart in other places. Families live on top of one another in cities because of the enormous speculative prices at which vacant lots are held. In the country they are scattered too far apart for social intercourse and convenience, because instead of taking what land he can use, every one can grab all he can get, in the hope of profiting by the increase of value, and the next man must pass farther on. Thus we have scores of families living under a single roof, and other families living in dug-outs on the prairies far from neighbors - some living too close to each other for moral, mental, or physical health, and others too far separated for the stimulating and refining influences of society.

The wastes in health, in mental vigor and in unnecessary transportation result in great economic losses which the single-tax would save.

II.

Let us turn to the moral side and consider the question of justice.

The right of property does not rest on human laws; they have often ignored and violated it. It rests on natural laws - that is to say, the law of God. It is clear and absolute, and every violation of it, whether committed by a man or a nation, is a violation of the command, "Thou shalt not steal." The man who catches a fish, grows an apple, raises a calf, builds a house, makes a coat, paints a picture, constructs a machine, has, as to any such thing, an exclusive right to ownership, which carries with it the right to give, to sell, or bequeath that thing. But who made the earth that any man can claim such ownership of it, or any part of it, or the right to give, sell, or bequeath it? Since the earth was not made by us, but is only the temporary dwelling place on which one generation of men follows another; since we who find ourselves here are manifestly here with the equal permission of the Creator, it is manifest that no man can have any exclusive right of ownership in land, and that the rights of all men to land must be equal and inalienable. There must be an exclusive right to the possession of land, for the man who uses it must have secure possession of land in order to reap the products of his labor. But this right of possession must be limited by the equal right of all, and should therefore be conditioned on the payment to the community by the possessor of an equivalent for any special valuable privilege thus accorded him.

When we tax houses, crops, money, furniture, capital, or wealth in any of its forms, we take from individuals what rightfully belongs to them. We violate the right of property, and in the name of the state commit robbery. But when we tax ground values we take from individuals what does not belong to them, but belongs to the community, and which cannot be left to individuals without the robbery of other individuals.

Think what the value of land is. It has no reference to the cost of production, as has the value of houses, horses, ships, clothes, or other things produced by labor; for land is not produced by man, it has been created by God. The value of land does not come from the exertion of labor on land, for the value thus produced is a value of improvement. That value that attaches to any piece of land means that that piece of land is more desirable than the land which other citizens may obtain, and that there are more willing to pay a premium for permission to use it. Justice, therefore, requires that this premium or value shall be taken for the benefit of all in order to secure to all their equal rights.

Consider the difference between the value of a building and the value of land. The value of a building, like the value of goods, or of anything properly styled wealth, is produced by individual exertion, and therefore properly belongs to the individual; but the value of land only arises with the growth and improvements of the community, and therefore properly belongs to the community. It is not because of what its owners have done, but because of the presence of the whole great population, that land in New York is worth millions an acre. This value, therefore, is the proper fund for defraying the common ex-

pense of the whole population; and it must be taken for public use, under penalty of generating land speculation and monopoly which will bring about artificial scarcity where the Creator has provided in abundance for all whom His providence has called into existence. It is thus a violation of justice to tax labor, or the things produced by labor, and it is also a violation of justice not to tax land values

These are the fundamental reasons for which we urge the single tax, believing it to be the greatest and most fundamental of all reforms. We do not think it will change human nature. That man can never do; but it will bring about conditions in which human nature can develop what is best; instead of, as now in many cases, what is worst. It will permit such enormous production of wealth as we can now hardly conceive. It will secure an equitable distribution. It will solve the labor problem, and dispell the darkening clouds which now are gathering over the horizon of our civilization. It will make undeserved poverty an unknown thing. It will check the soul-destroying greed of gain. It will enable men to be at least as honest, as true, as considerate, and as high-minded as they would like to be. It will remove temptations to lying, false swearing, bribery and law-breaking. It will open to all, even to the poorest, the comforts and refinements and opportunities of an advancing civilization. It will thus, so we reverently believe, clear the way for the coming of that kingdom of right and justice, and consequently of abundance and peace and happiness, for which the Master told His disciples to pray and work. It is not because it is a promising invention or cunning device that we look

for the single-tax to do all this; it is because it involves a conforming of the most fundamental adjustments of society to the supreme law of justice, because it involves the basing of the most important of our laws on the principle that we should do to others as we would be done by. - From the Financial Reform Almanac.

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