

Monterey Peninsula Herald

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California Land Frauds

By FRED W. WORKMAN
(Contributed)

The Herald's disclosure of the history of David Jacks and his shenanigans with lawyers and politicians to rob the people of Monterey of their heritage of lands, is indeed shocking, but The Herald is to be credited for bringing the facts before the people.

There have been many land frauds in California, and, as large as the David Jacks' was, it is small compared with some others, especially the Southern Pacific and Miller and Lux grabs, all manipulated legally, apparently, but by means of conniving lawyers and politicians who had their price.

Most of the best farming lands of California were thus taken over in big areas, which were originally Spanish grants. Having traveled the byways of California over 50 years ago, I have seen hundreds of shacks and cabins which had been abandoned by would-be settlers after they had tried to make homes on marginal lands which were the only lands available to them. This for the reason that all the good lands were monopolized.

These facts bring out the need for land taxation as advocated by Henry George. Increase land taxation would have broken up the holdings of large land speculators. Land has always been plentiful in California, but has been made artificially scarce and high priced because it has been taxed low and thus could be held by

speculators for high prices.

There has been one area of California, however, where the Henry George principles of taxation have been applied with great success, proving the idea sound. This started about 1880 with the passage of the Wright Irrigation District Law, under which about 50 irrigation districts were developed in California. This law provides that bond issues to develop irrigation water and the rates for that water must apply to all land in the district, whether or not the water is used and do not apply to improvements on the land. This made it too expensive for speculative land holders to hold land idle, or for use even for grazing purposes in these districts, so they were forced to sell the land in small tracts at reasonable prices to farmers. Thus has come about the glory and success of the small irrigated farms throughout California, especially in the San Joaquin Valley.

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While I am devoutly in favor of the Henry George plan of taxation, I admit that there is one place in California where the old system of taxes has worked out for the benefit of the community. That is the Monterey Peninsula. This exception proves the rule. Land on the Peninsula is like silk hats. They are a luxury, not a necessity. If someone monopolizes silk hats and raises the price to any height, no one need be concerned, as one can do without a silk hat.

The David Jacks land grab did not include good agricultural land, but only the scenic land of our area. No one was forced through necessity to locate here. Other lands were more favorable for farming. The fact that David Jacks held most of the land in large tracts made some of it available for Fort Ord and what he sold to Tom Work and the Del Monte Properties Co. also was held in large tracts and its beauty preserved.

The Del Monte Co. deserves praise for the way they have preserved and improved the beauty of this area. Pacific Grove has been greatly benefited by the generous deals they made for their golf courses and waterfront lands. I personally can also testify to being greatly benefited by the Del Monte Properties Co. as they sold me land on long-term payments without a down payment — terms which were not available elsewhere and which enabled me to get into business on small capital.

We are living in one of the most beautiful places in the world, and enjoy the finest and most healthful climate found on earth. We are a part of the greatest country in existence, so let us take time to appreciate our well being and good fortune to be living here. Let us enjoy our freedom and our free enterprise and all the good it has brought to us.

Let us defend our way of life against all impractical, Socialistic dreams (proven so by history)

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NEWS

Comments

In the 1860s in San Francisco, an odd-job printer was out of work and in wretched poverty. His wife was having her second child, there was no food in the house and the landlord was threatening eviction because the rent was not paid.

The young man, who was slim and frail, as a last resort went into the streets to beg. He told his story to a stranger, who gave him \$5. That saved the day.

"If he had not given me the money, I think I was desperate enough to kill him," the young man said later. These were strong words from so mild a man.

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Out of the experience the young man had a brain-storm. He reached the conclusion that all poverty in the world and all economic evils were due one thing — rent. Abolish rent, he thought, and the millenium would be at hand, with all humanity living happily ever after.

He reasoned that real estate attained its value due to the activity and production of the people in its vicinity and not through any contribution of its owner to society.

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and strive to so perfect our way of life that all peoples everywhere will gladly want to follow freely (not be forced) after us. We have the production of wealth which is our first necessity. We only need to perfect its distribution so that involuntary poverty can be abolished and non-employment ended.

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The remedy he proposed was a massive tax on land (but not on the improvements on the land) that would take all the profit out of owning land. This tax, he said, would make all other taxes unnecessary.

It is strange indeed that so naive a view, representing such an oversimplification of the complex subject of political economy, should have won tens of thousands of zealous converts and should have become the basis of a political movement that swept through the country and attracted adherents in other English-speaking lands — in Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

The young man was Henry George and his movement became known as Single Tax. One reason for its spread, no doubt, was that Henry George had a touch of the messiah in him. He argued with a fervor that captured the imagination of men.

He said that Single Tax would "raise wages, increase the earnings of capital, extirpate pauperism, abolish poverty, give remunerative employment to whoever wishes it, afford free scope to human powers, purify government and carry civilization to yet nobler heights." What more could any man of good will ask?

George became a newspaperman, then set forth his plan in his famous book, "Progress and Poverty." Although he had no personal political ambitions, his adherents nominated him for mayor of New York in 1886 and almost succeeded in electing him. George died in 1897 and was given a funeral worthy of a prophet, with countless thousands passing his bier.

Single Tax is largely forgotten today. But not entirely forgotten. There are still members of the valiant

band with us and they have not given up.

One of them is Fred W. Workman of Pacific Grove. Mr. Workman retired a year or so ago at the age of 75, after having operated the 17-Mile Drive Court for many years. His aim, he has told us, is to live to be 100. He has never drunk alcohol or smoked, eats only the most wholesome foods and takes every care of his health.

Over the years Mr. Workman has written letters to The Herald incessantly. They have dealt with many subjects, but have usually ended up with an argument for Single Tax. In Mr. Workman's eyes virtually all current events prove the validity of the philosophy of Henry George. Everything that happens leads Mr. Workman to that same conclusion — that Single Tax is what we need.

We always have been glad to hear from Mr. Workman, since he writes well and obviously is sincere. But because of space limitations, we have had to ration him to about one letter on Single Tax per month.

The Herald recently published a series of articles about Monterey's loss of city lands to David Jacks. This has led Mr. Workman to conclude that this case once more proves—yes, you have guessed it — the rightness of Single Tax.

Although we do not subscribe to the economic ideas of Henry George, we have always had a warm spot in our heart for him — as a fellow newspaper man, an idealist and a man with the courage of his convictions. We likewise have a warm spot in our heart for Mr. Workman — as a sincere man who would like to improve humanity (through Single Tax).

So this time we are publishing Mr. Workman's contribution, virtually uncut, as an article — E. K.

Monterey Next ?

Editor, The Herald:

It was good to see the article, "California Land Frauds" by our friend, Fred Workman, in your issue of Jan. 28. I also read with interest your comments on Mr. Workman and Henry George. While you were generally sympathetic in tone, I should like to comment on a couple of points.

It is strange, you say, that "so naive a view, representing such an oversimplification of the complex subject of political economy" should have won so many converts. I must turn the matter around, and point out that it is you who have oversimplified a complex subject in three short paragraphs, which took George eight books to explain. Perhaps if you studied the subject more intensively, you wouldn't find it so strange that George had such a following!

You say that Single Tax is mostly forgotten; but there are "still" people around who "have not given up" — like our friend Mr. Workman. This suggests that there is a declining band of old-timers, a sort of G.A.R., who still pull out their bugles once a year. The fact is that there is a growing, thriving Henry George movement attracting greater numbers of people every year. A very active extension of the Henry George School exists in San Francisco, and this extension has recently launched branches in Marin County, Sacramento, Berkeley and Palo Alto. Watch out! Monterey may be next.

The Henry George proposal is a live issue in California. Land value taxation and exemption of improvements are being studied by the state legislature.

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