

There is everything in a name; I learned that lesson when I was a boy in the city of Philadelphia. I was educated in a very strict faith. My people and the people whom I knew in my childhood, the people who went to our church and other churches of the same kind, had a notion that the theater was a very bad place, and they would not go to the theater on any account. There is a celebrated fellow citizen of mine of the name of Barnum, the man who came over here and bought Jumbo. Barnum came to Philadelphia and he recognized that prejudice, and saw that, although there were a number of theaters running for the ungodly, a theater he could get the godly to go to would pay extremely well. But he did not start a theater, Oh, no! He started a lecture room, and ran in that lecture room theatrical representations. It was crowded every night in the week, with two matinees in the afternoons. Now it seems to me, and it has seemed to me from the beginning, that the easy way, the gentle way, the kindly way, the pleasant way of getting rid of the landlord was not by violently dispossessing him, but by simply taxing him out. (Applause.)

Tract No. 17, Published by
Henry George Tract Society, Endwell, N. Y.
C. LeBaron Goeller, Manager

Single-Tax — or the taxation of
land values

A Method FOR SECURING THE EQUAL RIGHTS OF ALL TO THE USE OF THE EARTH

by
HENRY GEORGE

From a speech made during his
second lecture tour of
Great Britain.

It is perfectly obvious, it needs no discussion, that all men have by right of birth an equal right to the use of the land of their country. That is clear. And yet there is another truth that is equally clear. For the best use of land there must be an individual right of possession that must be certain. We cannot leave land a common. We cannot treat land as we treat the air, and let any man take at any time what he wants of it. Men will not sow a field unless they be assured that they will be able to reap the crop. No one will put a great building upon a lot to which his title can be questioned at any time. No one will open a mine unless he be assured that he will be able afterwards to profit by his labor. These are the two great

principles—that the rights of all men to the use of the land of their country are equal, and that there needs must be individual possession. But they are easily reconciled. Individual possession need not necessarily mean individual ownership. It is perfectly clear that equality could be secured if the community were to treat the land as common property and let it out to the individuals who wished to use it, taking for the common use the rents paid by the individuals who obtained a benefit greater than fell to the mass of their countrymen. That mode of solving the land question is, I think, that which is proposed by those who generally speak of themselves as land nationalizers in the narrow meaning of the term. Such a plan, if carried out, would secure perfect equality; and, as Herbert Spencer well says, an individual could pay his rent quite as well to the state as he could to Sir John or My Lord Duke. Nevertheless, there is a complexity attached to that method which is repellent to a man who has perceived the full beauty of free traders who believe that in leaving matters as far as possible to individual impulse you will secure the best interest of the whole. There is too much interference about it, and it raises in the beginning the idea of compensation.

You are going to take this land from the present owners; therefore you ought to compensate them. (Loud cries of "No"; and a voice "Yes.") Well, I really think there has been some advance since I was here last. (Applause.) It is unnecessary for me to say that I don't believe in compensation. It is not necessary for me to say that, to my notion, if anybody is to be compensated it should be those who have suffered from the system, not those who have gained by it. Nevertheless, there is practical difficulty. Nevertheless, compensation has strength to many men's minds. But there is an easier way still than I have described—a way in which this difficulty can be avoided. It accords with all our customs and habits of thought that, when private property is taken for public uses the holders shall be compensated, but it does not accord with our habits of thought and our practice that when a tax is levied anybody should be compensated for having the tax levied upon him. If you will think of it, it is perfectly clear that to take the simple and easy way of taxing land values would ultimately lead to the same point as taking land and letting it out. People are used to paying taxes to the state; they are not used to paying rent to the state. Call your rent taxes, and the thing is done. (Applause.)