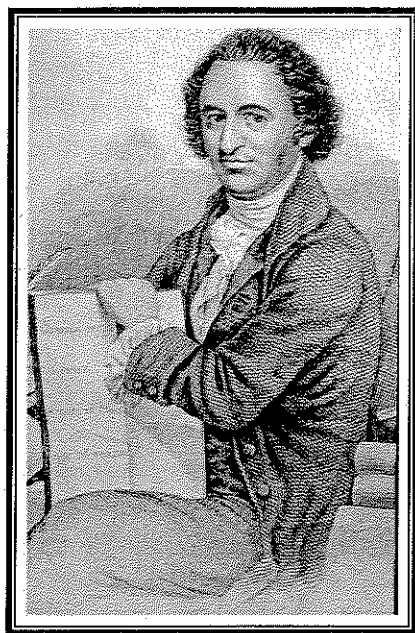


Tom Paine's Social Security Proposal



Can it Solve Pennsylvania's Property Tax Crisis?

With an introduction and critique
by Dan Sullivan, director
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A Solution from the Past

With all the hyperbole about real estate taxes, the only objections that stand up to scrutiny are that they discourage construction and maintenance of buildings, and that they are burdensome to elderly people.

Tom Paine solved both problems with a single proposal. He argued that only the real estate tax should fall only on the value of land, and that proceeds from this tax should be used to fund an annual stipend for each citizen over 50. The ages and amounts specified are not important today, as people age more slowly and monetary values have changed so much. It is the spirit of his proposal that serves as a model for benefitting senior citizens. That proposal is acknowledged by the Social Security Administration as the first proposal for a social security fund, and it appears on their web site.

There are two components to Paine's proposal. One is to tax land values (in his words, to charge a "ground rent,") without taxing real estate improvements, and the other is to issue a per-capita grant to senior citizens from the proceeds. While we agree with both components, we note that either can be adopted with beneficial effects.

Protecting senior citizens

Of all the proposals to shelter poor senior citizens from property tax increases, a per capita grant from real estate tax proceeds is clearly the best option, and the only proposal that benefits *all* senior citizens without crippling the local tax base. Shifting to land value tax also benefits senior citizens (even more than it benefits home owners generally) because they tend to live either in older neighborhoods with lower land values, or in high-rise buildings that make very efficient use of land.

A taxing jurisdiction could be given permission to make a per capita grant to seniors, not to exceed the revenue collected from residential properties occupied by seniors. The jurisdiction might choose to ignore the option entirely, to use the rebate only to offset tax increases, or to give seniors a local social security "supplement."

Better than tax rebates

Tax rebates tend to mostly benefit those seniors who have the most expensive real estate. Unless parallel rent rebates are adopted, elderly renters are not helped at all.

Pennsylvania's lottery-based rebate scheme has tried to offset this problem by using income as a means test and weighting the rebates accordingly. However, income is not a reliable measure of ability to pay for retired people. Some of the wealthiest retirees have very little reportable income, as their investments are designed to grow in value but yield no income until they are sold.

Better than assessment caps

Assessment caps protect only those seniors whose assessments have increased, and do so at the expense of other taxpayers, including other senior citizens. Moreover, property assessments tend to increase most in the richest neighborhoods, and to not at all in many of the poorest neighborhoods. As a result, assessment caps for senior citizens primarily protect the richest seniors, while the poorest seniors are left, not only to pay their own taxes, but to make up a portion of the shortfall that comes from protecting wealthier seniors.

Better than shifting to sales or income taxes

Reducing reliance on property taxes protects the wrong kind of "elderly poor property owner." That is, it protects large corporations and wealthy individuals who hold elderly poor properties. Besides shifting the tax burden from these taxpayers onto ordinary citizens,

reducing property taxes makes it easier for these taxpayers to hold properties in an blighted state and wait for tax-financed redevelopment authorities to bail them out.

States that have curtailed property taxes have suffered from massive land speculation, leading to inflated and unstable real estate prices and the most unaffordable housing. In contrast, Pennsylvania cities that increased taxes only on land values have consistently outperformed property-taxing neighboring cities.

Property tax is also less costly to ordinary citizens than either sales or income tax. A Pittsburgh study sponsored by then-council-president Jack Wagner showed that income taxes were costing Pittsburgh home owners twice as much over their lifetimes as equivalent property taxes, and three times as much as land value taxes. A study sponsored by Pittsburgh's mayor Caliguiri showed that the city's income tax (which Caliguiri himself had favored) was the number one reason given by people leaving Pittsburgh as to why they had left.

Meanwhile, Citizens for Tax Justice found that Pennsylvania's sales tax was more regressive than its income tax, despite exemptions for food, clothing and medicine. Most senior citizens would still pay more under a sales tax than they would pay under an equivalent property tax.

Based on principle

Paine's proposal was not put forward as a "gimmick," like these other proposals, but was derived from a principle that many of our founding fathers embraced. His essay begins by stating that principle:

It is a position not to be controverted that the earth, in its natural, cultivated state was, and ever would have continued to be, *the common property of the human race*. In that state every man would have been born to property. He would have been a joint

life proprietor with rest in the property of the soil, and in all its natural productions, vegetable and animal.

But the earth in its natural state, as before said, is capable of supporting but a small number of inhabitants compared with what it is capable of doing in a cultivated state. And as it is impossible to separate the improvement made by cultivation from the earth itself, upon which that improvement is made, the idea of landed property arose from that parable connection; but it is nevertheless true, that it is the value of the improvement, only, and not the earth itself, that is individual property.

Every proprietor, therefore, of cultivated lands, owes to the community a *ground-rent* (for I know of no better term to express the idea) for the land which he holds; and it is from this ground-rent that the fund proposed in this plan is to issue.

Paine emphasized that improvements should not be taxed:

The additional value made by cultivation... became the property of those who did it, or who inherited it from them, or who purchased it.... While, therefore, I advocate the right, and interest myself in the hard case of all those who have been thrown out of their natural inheritance by the introduction of the system of landed property, I equally defend the right of the possessor to the part which is his.

A challenge to poverty

Paine's proposal was also a challenge to what he and others regarded as the root cause of poverty in Europe. He was inspired by his outrage at the sermon of an Anglican bishop, titled, "The Wisdom and Goodness of God, in having made both Rich and Poor; with an Appendix, containing Reflections on the Present State of England and France."

To this Paine replied, "It is wrong to say God made *rich* and *poor*; He made only *male* and *female*, and He gave them the earth for their inheritance."

His observation paralleled that of Jefferson, who noted that land monopoly in France was the cause of poverty there:

The property of this country is absolutely concentrated in a very few hands.... These employ the flower of the country as servants, some of them having as many as 200 domestics, not laboring. They employ also a great number of manufacturers and tradesmen, and lastly the class of laboring husbandmen. But after all there comes the most numerous of all classes, that is, the poor who cannot find work. I asked myself what could be the reason so many should be permitted to beg who are willing to work, in a country where there is a very considerable proportion of uncultivated lands?...

Whenever there are in any country uncultivated lands and unemployed poor, it is clear that the laws of property have been so far extended as to violate natural right.... It is too soon yet in our country to say that every man who cannot find employment, but who can find uncultivated land, shall be at liberty to cultivate it, paying a moderate rent. But it is not too soon to provide by every possible means that as few as possible shall be without a little portion of land. The small landholders are the most precious part of a state. [Letter to James Madison, Sr., from Fontainebleau, France]

Encouraging compact development, protecting seniors, and fighting poverty

A modified version of Tom Paine's proposal can solve several nagging problems. It can help Pennsylvania taxing jurisdictions attract compact development, thereby creating jobs and housing without encouraging sprawl.

It can thoroughly protect senior citizens, without favoring richer seniors at the expense of poorer seniors.

Finally, if Tom Paine and Thomas Jefferson are correct, as we believe them to be, Paine's proposal could help alleviate poverty by making land more accessible to ordinary people.

It makes Tom Paine's essay well worth considering, and so we reprint it here.

Agrarian Justice

by Tom Paine

Author's Inscription

To the Legislature and the Executive Directory of the French Republic

[i01] THE plan contained in this work is not adapted for any particular country alone: the principle on which it is based is general. But as the rights of man are a new study in this world, and one needing protection from priestly imposture, and the insolence of oppressions too long established, I have thought it right to place this little work under your safeguard.

[i02] When we reflect on the long and dense night in which France and all Europe have remained plunged by their governments and their priests, we must feel less surprise than grief at the bewilderment caused by the first burst of light that dispels the darkness. The eye accustomed to darkness can hardly bear at first the broad daylight. It is by usage the eye learns to see, and it is the same in passing from any situation to its opposite.

[i03] As we have not at one instant renounced all our errors, we cannot at one stroke acquire knowledge of all our rights. France has had the honor of adding to the word *Liberty* that of *Equality*; and this word signifies essentially a principle that admits of no gradation in the things to which it applies. But equality is often misunderstood, often misapplied, and often violated.

[i04] *Liberty* and *Property* are words expressing all those of our possessions which are not of an intellectual nature. There are two kinds of property. Firstly, natural property, or that which comes to us from the Creator of the universe — such as the earth, air, water. Secondly, artificial or acquired property — the invention of men.

[105] In the latter, equality is impossible; for to distribute it equally it would be necessary that all should have contributed in the same proportion, which can never be the case; and this being the case, every individual would hold on to his own property, as his right share. Equality of natural property is the subject of this little essay. Every individual in the world is born therein with legitimate claims on a certain kind of property, or its equivalent.

[106] The right of voting for persons charged with the execution of the laws that govern society is inherent in the word liberty, and constitutes the equality of personal rights. But even if that right (of voting) were inherent in property, which I deny, the right of suffrage would still belong to all equally, because, as I have said, all individuals have legitimate birthrights in a certain species of property.

[107] I have always considered the present Constitution of the French Republic the *best organized system* the human mind has yet produced. But I hope my former colleagues will not be offended if I warn them of an error which has slipped into its principle. Equality of the right of suffrage is not maintained. This right is in it connected with a condition on which it ought not to depend; that is, with a proportion of a certain tax called "direct."

[108] The dignity of suffrage is thus lowered; and, in placing it in the scale with an inferior thing, the enthusiasm that right is capable of inspiring is diminished. It is impossible to find any equivalent counterpoise for the right of suffrage, because it is alone worthy to be its own basis, and cannot thrive as a graft, or an appendage.

[109] Since the Constitution was established we have seen two conspiracies stranded — that of Babeuf, and that of some obscure personages who decorate themselves with the despicable name of "royalists." The defect in principle of the Constitution was the origin of Babeuf's conspiracy.

[110] He availed himself of the resentment caused by this flaw, and instead of seeking a remedy by legitimate and constitutional means, or proposing some measure useful to society, the conspirators did their best to renew disorder and confusion, and constituted themselves personally into a Directory, which is formally destructive of election and representation. They were, in fine, extravagant enough to suppose that society, occupied with its domestic affairs, would blindly yield to them a directorship usurped by violence.

[111] The conspiracy of Babeuf was followed in a few months by that of the royalists, who foolishly flattered themselves with the notion of doing great things by feeble or foul means. They counted on all the discontented, from whatever cause, and tried to rouse, in their turn, the class of people who had been following the others. But these new chiefs acted as if they thought society had nothing more at heart than to maintain courtiers, pensioners, and all their train, under the contemptible title of royalty. My little essay will disabuse them, by showing that society is aiming at a very different end — maintaining itself.

[112] We all know or should know, that the time during which a revolution is proceeding is not the time when its resulting advantages can be enjoyed. But had Babeuf and his accomplices taken into consideration the condition of France under this Constitution, and compared it with what it was under the tragical revolutionary government, and during the execrable Reign of Terror, the rapidity of the alteration must have appeared to them very striking and astonishing. Famine has been replaced by abundance, and by the well-founded hope of a near and increasing prosperity.

[113] As for the defect in the Constitution, I am fully convinced that it will be rectified constitutionally, and that this step is indispensable; for so long as it continues it will inspire the hopes and furnish the means of conspirators; and for the rest, it is regrettable that a Constitution so wisely organized should err

so much in its principle. This fault exposes it to other dangers which will make themselves felt.

[i14] Intriguing candidates will go about among those who have not the means to pay the direct tax and pay it for them, on condition of receiving their votes. Let us maintain inviolably equality in the sacred right of suffrage: public security can never have a basis more solid. *Salut et Fraternité.*

Your former colleague,
Thomas Paine

Author's English Preface (*editors notes follow*)

[ep01] THE following little piece was written in the winter of 1795 and '96; and, as I had not determined whether to publish it during the present war, or to wait till the commencement of a peace, it has lain by me, without alteration or addition, from the time it was written.

[ep02] What has determined me to publish it now is a sermon preached by Watson, Bishop of Llandaff. Some of my readers will recollect, that this Bishop wrote a book entitled "An Apology for the Bible," in answer to my second part of "The Age of Reason." I procured a copy of his book, and he may depend upon hearing from me on that subject.

[ep03] At the end of the Bishop's book is a list of the works he has written. Among which is the sermon alluded to ; it is entitled: "The Wisdom and Goodness of God, in having made both Rich and Poor; with an Appendix, containing Reflections on the Present State of England and France."

[ep04] The error contained in this sermon determined me to publish my "Agrarian Justice." It is wrong to say God made *rich* and *poor*; He made only *male* and *female*, and He gave them the earth for their inheritance.

[ep05] Instead of preaching to encourage one part of mankind in insolence... it would be better that priests employed their time to render the general condition of man less miserable than it is. Practical religion consists in doing good: and the only way of serving God is that of endeavoring to make His creation happy. All preaching that has not this, for its object is nonsense and hypocrisy.

— Thomas Paine

Main Text (*editor's notes follow*)

[01] To preserve the benefits of what is called civilized life, and to remedy at the same time the evil which it has produced, ought to be considered as one of the first objects of reformed legislation.

[02] Whether that state that is proudly, perhaps erroneously, called civilization, has most promoted or most injured the general happiness of man is a question that may be strongly contested. On one side, the spectator is dazzled by splendid appearances; on the other, he is shocked by extremes of wretchedness; both of which it has erected. The most affluent and the most miserable of the human race are to be found in the countries that are called civilized.

[03] To understand what the state of society ought to be, it is necessary to have some idea of the natural and primitive state of man; such as it is at this day among the Indians of North America. There is not, in that state, any of those spectacles of human misery which poverty and want present to our eyes in all the towns and streets in Europe.

[04] Poverty, therefore, is a thing created by that which is called civilized life. It exists not in the natural state. On the other hand, the natural state is without those advantages which flow from agriculture, arts, science and manufactures.

[05] The life of an Indian is a continual holiday, compared with the poor of Europe; and, on the other hand it appears to be abject when compared to the rich. Civilization, therefore, or

that which is so-called, has operated two ways: to make one part of society more affluent, and the other more wretched, than would have been the lot of either in a natural state.

[06] It is always possible to go from the natural to the civilized state, but it is never possible to go from the civilized to the natural state. The reason is that man in a natural state, subsisting by hunting, requires ten times the quantity of land to range over to procure himself sustenance, than would support him in a civilized state, where the earth is cultivated.

[07] When, therefore, a country becomes populous by the additional aids of cultivation, art and science, there is a necessity of preserving things in that state; because without it there cannot be sustenance for more, perhaps, than a tenth part of its inhabitants. The thing, therefore, now to be done is to remedy the evils and preserve the benefits that have arisen to society by passing from the natural to that which is called the civilized state.

[08] In taking the matter upon this ground, the first principle of civilization ought to have been, and ought still to be, that the condition of every person born into the world, after a state of civilization commences, ought not to be worse than if he had been born before that period.

[09] But the fact is that the condition of millions, in every country in Europe, is far worse than if they had been born before civilization began, had been born among the Indians of North America at the present. I will show how this fact has happened.

[10] It is a position not to be controverted that the earth, in its natural, cultivated state was, and ever would have continued to be, *the common property of the human race*. In that state every man would have been born to property. He would have been a joint life proprietor with rest in the property of the soil, and in all its natural productions, vegetable and animal.

done, an indemnification for that loss, and has thereby created a species of poverty and wretchedness that did not exist before.

[20] In advocating the case of the persons thus dispossessed, it is a right, and not a charity, that I am pleading for. But it is that kind of right which, being neglected at first, could not be brought forward afterwards till heaven had opened the way by a revolution in the system of government. Let us then do honor to revolutions by justice, and give currency to their principles by blessings.

[21] Having thus in a few words, opened the merits of the case, I shall now proceed to the plan I have to propose, which is,

[22] To create a national fund, out of which there shall be paid to every person, when arrived at the age of twenty-one years, the sum of fifteen pounds sterling, as a compensation in part, for the loss of his or her natural inheritance, by the introduction of the system of landed property:

[23] And also, the sum of ten pounds per annum, during life, to every person now living, of the age of fifty years, and to all others as they shall arrive at that age.

Means by which the fund is to be created

[24] I have already established the principle, namely, that the earth, in its natural uncultivated state was, and ever would have continued to be, *the common property of the human race*; that in that state, every person would have been born to property; and that the system of landed property, by its inseparable connection with cultivation, and with what is called civilized life, has absorbed the property of all those whom it dispossessed, without providing, as ought to have been done, an indemnification for that loss.

[25] The fault, however, is not in the present possessors. No complaint is tended, or ought to be alleged against them, unless they adopt the crime by opposing justice. The fault is in the system, and it has stolen perceptibly upon the world, aided afterwards by

the agrarian law of the sword. But the fault can be made to reform itself by successive generations; and without diminishing or deranging the property of any of present possessors, the operation of the fund can yet commence, and in full activity, the first year of its establishment, or soon after, as I shall show.

[26] It is proposed that the payments, as already stated, be made to every person, rich or poor. It is best to make it so, to prevent invidious distinctions. It is also right it should be so, because it is in lieu of the natural inheritance, which, as a right, belongs to every man, over and above property he may have created, or inherited from those who did. Such persons as do not choose to receive it can throw it into the common fund.

[27] Taking it then for granted that no person ought to be in a worse condition when born under what is called a state of civilization, than he would have been had he been born in a state of nature, and that civilization ought to have made, and ought still to make, provision for that purpose, it can only be done by subtracting from property a portion equal in value to the natural inheritance it has absorbed.

[28] Various methods may be proposed for this purpose, but that which appears to be the best (not only because it will operate without deranging any present possessors, or without interfering with the collection of taxes or *emprunts* necessary for the purposes of government and the Revolution, but because it will be the least troublesome and the most effectual, and also because the subtraction will be made at a time that best admits it) is at the moment that property is passing by the death of one person to the possession of another. In this case, the bequeather gives nothing: the receiver pays nothing. The only matter to him is that the monopoly of natural inheritance, to which there never was a right, begins to cease in his person. A generous man would not wish it to continue, and a just man will rejoice to see it abolished.

[29] My state of health prevents my making sufficient inquiries with respect to the doctrine of probabilities, whereon to found calculations with such degrees of certainty as they are capable of. What, therefore, I offer on this head is more the result of observation and reflection than of received information; but I believe it will be found to agree sufficiently with fact. In the first place, taking twenty-one years as the epoch of maturity, all the property of a nation, real and personal, is always in the possession of persons above that age. It is then necessary to know, as a datum of calculation, the average of years which persons above that age will live. I take this average to be about thirty years, for though many persons will live forty, fifty, or sixty years, after the age of twenty-one years, others will die much sooner, and some in every year of that time.

[30] Taking, then, thirty years as the average of time, it will give, without any material variation one way or other, the average of time in which the whole property or capital of a nation, or a sum equal thereto, will have passed through one entire revolution in descent, that is, will have gone by deaths to new possessors; for though, in many instances, some parts of this capital will remain forty, fifty, or sixty years in the possession of one person, other parts will have revolved two or three times before those thirty years expire, which will bring it to that average; for were one-half the capital of a nation to revolve twice in thirty years, it would produce the same fund as if the whole revolved once.

[31] Taking, then, thirty years as the average of time in which the whole capital of a nation, or a sum equal thereto, will revolve once, the thirtieth part thereof will be the sum that will revolve every year, that is, will go by deaths to new possessors; and this last sum being thus known, and the ratio per cent to be subtracted from It determined, it will give the annual amount or income of the proposed fund, to be applied as already mentioned.

[32] In looking over the discourse of the English Minister, Pitt, in his opening of what is called in England the budget (the scheme of finance for the year 1796), I find an estimate of the national capital of that unity. As this estimate of a national capital is prepared ready to my hand, I take it as a datum to act upon. When a calculation is made upon the known capital of any nation, combined with its population, it will serve as a scale for any other nation, in proportion as its capital and population be more or less.

[33] I am the more disposed to take this estimate of Mr. Pitt, for the purpose of showing to that minister, upon his own calculation, how much better money may be employed than in wasting it, as he has done, on the wild project of setting up Bourbon kings. What, in the name of heaven, re Bourbon kings to the people of England? It is better that the people have bread.

[34] Mr. Pitt states the national capital of England, real and personal, to one thousand three hundred millions sterling, which is about one-fourth part of the national capital of France, including Belgia. The event of the last harvest in each country proves that the soil of France more productive than that of England, and that it can better support twenty-four or twenty-five millions of inhabitants than that of England n seven or seven and a half millions.

[35] The thirtieth part of this capital of £ 1,300,000,000 is L 43,333,333 which the part that will revolve every year by deaths in that country to new possessors; and the sum that will annually revolve in France in the proportion of four to one, will be about one hundred and seventy-three millions sterling. From this sum of £ 43,333,333 annually revolving, is be subtracted the value of the natural inheritance absorbed in it, which, perhaps, in fair justice, cannot be taken at less, and ought not be taken for more, than a tenth part.

[36] It will always happen that of the property thus revolving by deaths every year a part will descend in a direct line to sons and daughters, and other part collaterally, and the proportion will be found to be about three to one; that is, about thirty millions of the above sum will descend to direct heirs, and the remaining sum of £413,333,333 to more distant relations, and in part to strangers.

[37] Considering, then, that man is always related to society, that relationship will become comparatively greater in proportion as the next of kin is more distant; it is therefore consistent with civilization to say that where there are no direct heirs society shall be heir to a part over and above the tenth part due to society.

[38] If this additional part be from five to ten or twelve per cent, in proportion as the next of kin be nearer or more remote, so as to average with the escheats that may fall, which ought always to go to society and not to the government (an addition of ten per cent more), the produce from the annual sum of £43,333,333 will be:

from £30,000,000 at ten per cent...	A £3,000,000
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from £13,333,333 at ten per cent with the addition of ten per cent more...	A £2,666,666
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£43,333,333	A £5,666,666
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[39] Having thus arrived at the annual amount of the proposed fund, I come, in the next place, to speak of the population proportioned to this fund and to compare it with the uses to which the fund is to be applied.

[40] The population (I mean that of England) does not exceed seven millions and a half, and the number of persons above the age of fifty will in that case be about four hundred thousand. There would not, however, be more than that number that would accept the proposed ten pounds sterling per annum, though they would be entitled to it. I have no idea it would be accepted by

many persons who had a yearly income of two or three hundred pounds sterling. But as we often see instances of rich people falling into sudden poverty, even at the age of sixty, they would always have the right of drawing all the arrears due to them. Four millions, therefore, of the above annual sum of £5,666,666 will be required for four hundred thousand aged persons, at ten pounds sterling each.

[41] I come now to speak of the persons annually arriving at twenty-one years of age. If all the persons who died were above the age of twenty-one years, the number of persons annually arriving at that age must be equal to the annual number of deaths, to keep the population stationary. But the greater part die under the age of twenty-one, and therefore the number of persons annually arriving at twenty-one will be less than half the number of deaths.

[42] The whole number of deaths upon a population of seven millions and an half will be about 220,000 annually. The number arriving at twenty-one years of age will be about 100,000. The whole number of these will not receive the proposed fifteen pounds, for the reasons already mentioned, though, as in the former case, they would be entitled to it. Admitting then that a tenth part declined receiving it, the amount would stand thus:

Fund annually	i£5,666,666
To 400,000 aged persons	
at £10 each	i£4,000,000
To 90,000 persons of 21 yrs.,	
£15 ster. Each	<u>i£1,350,000</u>
	<u>i£5,350,000</u>
Remains	i£ 316,666

[43] There are, in every country, a number of blind and lame persons totally incapable of earning a livelihood. But as it

will always happen that the greater number of blind persons will be among those who are above the age of fifty years, they will be provided for in that class. The remaining sum of £316,666 will provide for the lame and blind under that age, at the same rate of £10 annually for each person.

[44] Having now gone through all the necessary calculations, and stated the particulars of the plan, I shall conclude with some observations.

[45] It is not charity but a right, not bounty but justice, that I am pleading for. The present state of civilization is as odious as it is unjust.¹ It is absolutely the opposite of what it should be, and it is necessary that a revolution should be made in it. The contrast of affluence and wretchedness continually meeting and offending the eye, is like dead and living bodies chained together. Though I care as little about riches as any man, I am a friend to riches because they are capable of good.

[46] I care not how affluent some may be, provided that none be miserable in consequence of it. But it is impossible to enjoy affluence with the felicity it is capable of being enjoyed, while so much misery is mingled in the scene. The sight of the misery, and the unpleasant sensations it suggests, which, though they may be suffocated cannot be extinguished, are a greater drawback upon the felicity of affluence than the proposed ten per cent upon property is worth. He that would not give the one to get rid of the other has no charity, even for himself.

[47] There are, in every country, some magnificent charities established by individuals. It is, however, but little that any individual can do, when the whole extent of the misery to be

¹ The preceding two sentences were omitted from the first English edition of 1797. *Editor to the 1925 Patriot edition*

relieved is considered. He may satisfy his conscience, but not his heart. He may give all that he has, and that all will relieve but little. It is only by organizing civilization upon such principles as to act like a system of pulleys, that the whole weight of misery can be removed.

[48] The plan here proposed will reach the whole. It will immediately relieve and take out of view three classes of wretchedness-the blind, the lame, and the aged poor; and it will furnish the rising generation with means to prevent their becoming poor; and it will do this without deranging or interfering with any national measures.

[49] To show that this will be the case, it is sufficient to observe that the operation and effect of the plan will, in all cases, be the same as if every individual were voluntarily to make his will and dispose of his property in the manner here proposed.

[50] But it is justice, and not charity, that is the principle of the plan. In all great cases it is necessary to have a principle more universally active than charity; and, with respect to justice, it ought not to be left to the choice of detached individuals whether they will do justice or not. Considering, then, the plan on the ground of justice, it ought to be the act of the whole growing spontaneously out of the principles of the revolution, and the reputation of it ought to be national and not individual

[51] A plan upon this principle would benefit the revolution by the energy that springs from the consciousness of justice. It would multiply also the national resources; for property, like vegetation, increases by offsets. When a young couple begin the world, the difference is exceedingly great whether they begin with nothing or with fifteen pounds apiece. With this aid they could buy a cow, and implements to cultivate a few acres of land; and instead of becoming burdens upon society, which is always the case where children are produced faster than they

can be fed, would be put in the way of becoming useful and profitable citizens. The national domains also would sell the better if pecuniary aids were provided to cultivate them in small lots.

[52] It is the practice of what has unjustly obtained the name of civilization (and the practice merits not to be called either charity or policy) to make some provision for persons becoming poor and wretched only at the time they become so. Would it not, even as a matter of economy, be far better to adopt means to prevent their becoming poor? This can best be done by making every person when arrived at the age of twenty-one years an inheritor of something to begin with.

[53] The rugged face of society, checkered with the extremes of affluence and want, proves that some extraordinary violence has been committed upon it, and calls on justice for redress. The great mass of the poor in countries are become an hereditary race, and it is next to impossible them to get out of that state of themselves. It ought also to be observed that this mass increases in all countries that are called civilized. re persons fall annually into it than get out of it.

[54] Though in a plan of which justice and humanity are the foundation principles, interest ought not to be admitted into the calculation, yet it is always of advantage to the establishment of any plan to show that it beneficial as a matter of interest. The success of any proposed plan submitted to public consideration must finally depend on the numbers interested in supporting it, united with the justice of its principles.

[55] The plan here proposed will benefit all, without injuring any. It will consolidate the interest of the republic with that of the individual. To the numerous class dispossessed of their natural inheritance by the system of landed property it will be an act of national justice. To persons dying possessed of moderate fortunes it will operate as a tontine to their children,

more beneficial than the sum of money paid into the fund: and it will give to the accumulation of riches a degree of security that none of old governments of Europe, now tottering on their foundations, can give.

[56] I do not suppose that more than one family in ten, in any of the countries of Europe, has, when the head of the family dies, a clear property of five hundred pounds sterling. To all such the plan is advantageous. That property would pay fifty pounds into the fund, and if there were only two children under age they would receive fifteen pounds each (thirty pounds), on coming of age, and be entitled to ten pounds a year after fifty.

[57] It is from the overgrown acquisition of property that the fund will support itself; and I know that the possessors of such property in England, though they would eventually be benefitted by the protection of nine-tenths of it, will exclaim against the plan. But without entering any inquiry how they came by that property, let them recollect that they have been the advocates of this war, and that Mr. Pitt has already laid on more new taxes to be raised annually upon the people of England, and that for supporting the despotism of Austria and the Bourbons against the liberties of France, than would pay annually all the sums proposed in this plan.

[58] I have made the calculations stated in this plan, upon what is called personal, as well as upon landed property. The reason for making it upon land is already explained; and the reason for taking personal property into the calculation is equally well founded though on a different principle. Land, as before said, is the free gift of the Creator in common to the human race. Personal property is the *effect of society*; and it is as impossible for an individual to acquire personal property without the aid of society, as it is for him to make land originally.

[59] Separate an individual from society, and give him an island or a continent to possess, and he cannot acquire personal property. He cannot be rich. So inseparably are the means connected with the end, in all cases, that where the former do not exist the latter cannot be obtained. All accumulation, therefore, of personal property, beyond what a man's own hands produce, is derived to him by living in society; and he owes on every principle of justice, of gratitude, and of civilization, a part of that accumulation back again to society from whence the whole came.

[60] This is putting the matter on a general principle, and perhaps it is best to do so; for if we examine the case minutely it will be found that the accumulation of personal property is, in many instances, the effect of paying too little for the labor that produced it; the consequence of which is that the working hand perishes in old age, and the employer abounds in affluence.

[61] It is, perhaps, impossible to proportion exactly the price of labor to the profits it produces; and it will also be said, as an apology for the injustice, that were a workman to receive an increase of wages daily he would not save it against old age, nor be much better for it in the interim. Make, then, society the treasurer to guard it for him in a common fund; for it is no reason that, because he might not make a good use of it for himself, another should take it.

[62] The state of civilization that has prevailed throughout Europe, is as unjust in its principle, as it is horrid in its effects; and it is the consciousness of this, and the apprehension that such a state cannot continue when once investigation begins in any country, that makes the possessors of property dread every idea of a revolution. It is the hazard and not the principle of revolutions that retards their progress. This being the case, it is necessary as well for the protection of property as for the sake of justice and humanity, to form a system that, while it preserves one part of society from wretchedness, shall secure the other from depreciation.

[63] The superstitious awe, the enslaving reverence, that formerly surrounded affluence, is passing away in all countries, and leaving the possessor of property to the convulsion of accidents. When wealth and splendor, instead of fascinating the multitude, excite emotions of disgust; and, instead of drawing forth admiration, it is beheld as an insult on wretchedness; when the ostentatious appearance it makes serves call the right of it in question, the case of property becomes critical, and it is only in a system of justice that the possessor can contemplate security.

[64] To remove the danger, it is necessary to remove the antipathies, and this can only be done by making property productive of a national bless, extending to every individual. When the riches of one man above other shall increase the national fund in the same proportion; when it shall be seen that the prosperity of that fund depends on the prosperity of individuals; when the more riches a man acquires, the better it shall for the general mass; it is then that antipathies will cease, and property be placed on the permanent basis of national interest and protection.

[65] I have no property in France to become subject to the plan I prose. What I have, which is not much, is in the United States of America. But I will pay one hundred pounds sterling toward this fund in France, the instant it shall be established; and I will pay the same sum England, whenever a similar establishment shall take place in that country.

[66] A revolution in the state of civilization is the necessary companion of revolutions in the system of government. If a revolution in any country be from bad to good, or from good to bad, the state of what is called civilization in that country, must be made conformable thereto, to giveth at revolution effect.

[67] Despotic government supports itself by abject civilization, in which debasement of the human mind, and wretchedness in the mass of the people, are the chief criterions. Such governments consider man merely as an animal; that the exercise of intellectual faculty is not his privilege; *that he has nothing to do with the laws but to obey them*;¹ and they politically depend more upon breaking the spirit of the people by poverty, than they fear enraging it by desperation.

[68] It is a revolution in the state of civilization that will give perfection to Revolution of France. Already the conviction that government by representation is the true system of government is spreading itself fast in the world. The reasonableness of it can be seen by all. The justness of it makes itself felt even by its opposers. But when a system of civilization, (growing out of that system of government) shall be so organized that not a man or woman born in the Republic but shall inherit some means of beginning the world, and see before them the certainty of escaping the miseries that under other governments accompany old age, the Revolution of France will have an advocate and an ally in the heart of all nations.

[69] An army of principles will penetrate where an army of soldiers cannot; it will succeed where diplomatic management would fall: it is neither the Rhine, the Channel, nor the ocean that can arrest its progress: it will march on the horizon of the world, and it will conquer.

Means for carrying the proposed plan into execution, and to render it at the same time conducive to the public interest

[70] I. Each canton shall elect in its primary assemblies, three persons, as commissioners for that canton, who shall take

¹ An expression used by Bishop Horsley in the Parliament of England — *Author*

cognizance, and keep a register of all matters happening in that canton, conformable to the charter that shall be established by law for carrying this plan into execution.

[71] II. The law shall fix the manner in which the property of deceased persons shall be ascertained.

[72] III. When the amount of the property of any deceased persons shall be ascertained, the principal heir to that property, or the eldest of the co-heirs, if of lawful age, or if under age, the person authorized by the will of the deceased to represent him or them, shall give bond to the commissioners of the canton to pay the said tenth part thereof in four equal quarterly payments, within the space of one year or sooner, at the choice of the payers. One-half of the whole property shall remain as a security until the bond be paid off.

[73] IV. The bond shall be registered in the office of the commissioners of the canton, and the original bonds shall be deposited in the national bank at Paris. The bank shall publish every quarter of a year the amount of the bonds in its possession, and also the bonds that shall have been paid off, or what parts thereof, since the last quarterly publication.

[74] The national bank shall issue bank notes upon the security of the bonds in its possession. The notes so issued, shall be applied to pay the pensions of aged persons, and the compensations to persons arriving at twenty-one years of age. It is both reasonable and generous to suppose, that persons not under immediate necessity, will suspend their right of drawing on the fund, until it acquire, as it will do, a greater degree of ability. In this case, it is proposed, that an honorary register be kept, in each canton, of the names of the persons thus suspending that right, at least during the present war.

[75] VI. As the inheritors of property must always take up their bonds in four quarterly payments, or sooner if they

choose, there will always be *numeraire* arriving at the bank after the expiration of the first quarter, to exchange for the bank notes that shall be brought in.

[76] VII. The bank notes being thus put in circulation, upon the best of all possible security, that of actual property, to more than four times the amount of the bonds upon which the notes are issued, and with *numeraire* continually arriving at the bank to exchange or pay them off whenever they shall be presented for that purpose, they will acquire a permanent value in all parts of the Republic. They can therefore be received in payment of taxes, or emprunts equal to *numeraire*, because the Government can always receive *numeraire* for them at the bank.

[77] VIII. It will be necessary that the payments of the ten per cent be made in *numeraire* for the first year from the establishment of the plan. But after the expiration of the first year, the inheritors of property may pay ten per cent either in bank notes issued upon the fund, or in *numeraire*.

[78] If the payments be in *numeraire*, it will lie as a deposit at the bank, be exchanged for a quantity of notes equal to that amount; and if in notes issued upon the fund, it will cause a demand upon the fund equal thereto; and thus the operation of the plan will create means to carry itself into execution

— Thomas Paine

Editor's Notes

from *The Live and Works of Thomas Paine*, Patriot's Edition, Thomas Paine National Historical Association, New Rochelle, New York, 1925, William Van der Weyde, editor

Editor's notes prefacing the author's edition

THIS tract, as Paine calls it, is identified with the Theophilanthropic movement which Paine started in Paris, in 1786-7, and later introduced in America. It is important as being a precursor of the single tax movement, popularized by Henry George, in his "Progress and Poverty," a century later.

Paine issued this pamphlet as a proposal to the French Government, at a time when readjustment of landed property had become necessary through the Revolution.

It was suggested to him by a sermon published by the Bishop of Llandaff, on "The Wisdom and Goodness of God in having made both rich and poor." Paine denies that God made rich and poor, declaring "He made only male and female, and gave them the earth for their inheritance."

Editor's preface to the author's English preface

IN THE same year (1797) that the pamphlet on "Agrarian Justice" was printed in English, by W. Adlard in Paris, an edition was brought out in London by Thomas Williams, who was prosecuted by the Crown for publishing Paine's "Age of Reason." Paine's preface to the London edition contained some sentences which the publisher suppressed under asterisks. Two sentences in particular were omitted from the pamphlet which are here given from the first Paris edition: "It is not charity but a right, not bounty but justice, that I am pleading for. The present state of civilization is as odious as it is unjust."

The English title adds a brief résumé of Paine's scheme to the caption — "Agrarian Justice opposed to Agrarian Law and to Agrarian Monopoly."

Editor's notes prefacing the main body

AS THE author says, "Equality of natural property is the subject of this essay." It was written while Paine was a guest of the Monroes, following his release from a Luxembourg prison, and a year later (1797) was first published in Paris. A prefatory note to the first edition states that "The sudden departure of Thomas Paine has prevented his supervising the translation of this work, to which he attaches great value. He has entrusted it to a friend...."

Paine had left Paris early in May of 1797, planning to accompany James Monroe and his wife to America, but reaching Havre, and suspecting danger of capture by an English warship should he sail, discreetly remained in France.

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