

A PIONEER SINGLE TAX LAW -
THE CALIFORNIA IRRIGATION DISTRICT ACT.

A brief explanation
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The primary object of the California Legislature in enacting this epochal Statute in 1887 was to enable the State to conserve water needed for the irrigation of its arid and semi-arid valleys, and for domestic purposes by the people.

The method established to finance the cost of the necessary storage dams, water rights and extensive system of canals and pipes was originally to empower each district to levy and collect unlimited ad-valorem taxes or assessments on all land and improvements. But, experience with land speculators, who would neither sell nor improve, brought a basic amendment to the law in 1909, which permitted the Districts to exempt completely from taxation all buildings, planted trees, vineyards, and live stock of every kind. The Districts already created, soon voted to take advantage of this amendment, and the 100 Districts, serving some 4,000,000 acres of the richest and most attractive irrigated orchards, vegetable gardens, vineyards, etc., etc., all exempt buildings and improvements of every sort from taxes today, and are all strong supporters of the system.

Their revenues are derived mainly from a tax on the annual rental value of the land, both rural and urban. Thus, they never take anything from the land user, AS USER, but only from what would otherwise go in unearned increment to an owner, AS OWNER. There is no limit on the amount of this rental value the District can demand, nor the number of years it can collect a tax on the rental value.

The purpose of this 1909 amendment is to make certain that those who work and improve their land will never have to pay more towards the expenses of the District than the absentee speculator, holding land of the same value unimproved. Thus, every land holder is taxed by these Districts, not according to "ability to pay", nor on what each produces, but only in just proportion to the rental value of the land he has the deed to. In this way, the equitable distribution of all earned wealth, is assured.

Voting is not restricted to those holding a title deed to land, although attempts have been made to get the law changed, so that only land owners could vote. That any important statute, so completely democratic as this one is, would be the object of repeated and implacable assaults, goes without saying.

"It is communism and confiscation under guise of law" was argued before the U.S. Supreme Court by Mr. Geo. H. Maxwell, as counsel for an English estate with land in San Diego County. The sweeping language employed by the Court in approving the constitutionality of this statute is well worth reading. (Falbrook I.D. v. Bradley, 164 US 112, (1896))

But the forces of monopoly and privilege, with title deeds to vast holdings of land, were not long fazed by this ruling of our highest court. There have been few periods since, when this statute has not been under attack, or attempts were not being made to amend ~~Weaken~~ it, from the standpoint of the common good.

Summarizing, each District created under this Act is decreed an "Agency of the State", with all its functions "exclusively governmental". All its properties, including the full rental value, present and future, of all land, no matter how acquired, held or used, are dedicated as a "Public Trust" "for the uses and purposes of the Act", and because its properties, including land foreclosed for unpaid taxes, are all "owned by the State", they are held exempt from partition, execution, or even taxation by other taxing divisions.

The full text of this Act and citations of court decrees are contained in Bulletin No. 18-F.
Bulletins No. 21, a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h, with essential statistics about each District, are also obtainable from the Supervisor of Documents, Sacramento, Calif.

W I L L I A M A L L E N W H I T E

Wrote in his Emporia Gazette, Aug. 20, 1941:

"Congress is defining its powers so broadly that it is beginning to consider the regulation of rent - rent from land. Congress surely has the power to regulate the rent that any person may appropriate. If Congress would subject the RENTAL VALUE OF LAND to its taxing power, Congress could fix rent problems AT THE SOURCE. IT COULD TAX IDLE LANDS WHICH PRODUCE NEITHER GUNS NOR BUTTER into coming into whatever productive value they have."

"The Single-Tax idea which gave Henry George his fame may be just around the corner. The idea has intrigued economists and social scientists for 50 years and more. It didn't seem then to have constitutional validity, but our Constitution seems to be giving Congress such broad powers that it would not be surprising to see Congress assuming powers that would establish HENRY GEORGE AS A MAJOR SAINT IN THE AMERICAN CALENDAR."

Excerpt from

"HARDLY A MAN IS NOW ALIVE"

The Autobiography of the
father of the Boy Scouts
DANIEL CARTER BEARD, Esq.

"Henry George not only possessed a great soul and a great mind, but he was a man who hesitated at no personal sacrifice for the cause he considered just.... When I read 'Progress and Poverty' for the first time, I could not read it rapidly enough. I eagerly devoured it, page by page. I had, and still have great reverence for the truths contained in Jefferson's wonderful Declaration of Independence, truths which, for some reason could not be realized or made practical because of some great obstacle."

"I NEVER REALIZED WHAT THAT OBSTACLE WAS UNTIL I READ 'PROGRESS AND POVERTY' by Henry George."

Nikolai Lenin said:

"The proper application of the Georgian taxation of land values is a tax on the mentality of the people and beyond the capacity of a nation not 10% of whom are able to read. They can not understand it. They can ONLY UNDERSTAND SOCIALISM AT PRESENT. Some day, with a higher average intelligence, we may adopt the taxation of land values and ENJOY ECONOMIC FREEDOM, but not now."

Vice Pres. Henry A. Wallace says:

"Sometimes I think land speculation is a plague more terrible than drought and insect pests and almost as bad as war itself."

"The annual rental value of land which is not taxed, that title holders are able to capitalize into 'land price', if government demanded the full rental value of all land, instead of only part of it, land speculation would be as dead as is 'gold hoarding'. Once this is done, wages would rise, and there would be no need for any taxes on wages, or any earned income. Inflation would no longer threaten."