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Everyone Should Pay His Share—Economist

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William W. Newcomb, at age 73, has behind him nearly a half-century of work in behalf of a single cause. And he's not through yet.

The cause is "land value taxation."

It's a deceivingly simple alternative: Tax all land for what it's worth to society, regardless of who owns it and what sits on it.

It's a plan the West Melbourne resident and others believe could realign an economy where the few live off the many, and end the paradox of a steadily increasing national wealth and an ever-lengthening welfare line.

It's a plan that he believes could cut a homeowner's taxes by one half to two thirds, just by distributing the tax load.

Newcomb has put his beliefs into a book published recently with his own money, titled "The Conspiracy Against Homeowners and Tenants."

The 32-page book capsulizes economic theory first expounded by 19th century economist Henry George, a message Newcomb said is now being spread by five non-profit institutions spending nearly $2 million annually.

"There is a predatory type of individual," Newcomb writes in his book, "who holds that only saps work, and fools make payments."

Newcomb makes it clear that most Americans fall into those latter categories, ignorant of their plight in part because of a media "conspiracy of silence."

Simply stated, Newcomb contends that most people have been systematically denied the chance to work for their own benefit, have been eaten alive by taxes, and increasingly find themselves unable to pay rent to landowners or to buy property for themselves.

Interested only in feathering their nests, politicians "have bowed to the speculator," Newcomb says. As evidence, he points to recent financial disclosure showing the bulk of Florida's state government leaders to be wealthy landowners.

He also cites figures from a former New York state planner: "While hundreds of millions of acres of our lands are still idle . . . 65 per cent of the population lives and works in less than one per cent of its total area, and 35 per cent of the people have all the rest of the country—over 99 per cent of it."

In tracing a history of the current economy, Newcomb says that land monopoly traditions were brought intact from England.

"Land monopoly has got Britain into socialism . . . brought Great Britain to its (economic) knees," he writes, because the ruling class escapes taxes so that the burden of government services is shouldered by the middle class.

In this country, he believes, lawmakers who

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Taxes Called Inequitable

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would like to equalize taxation "cannot find a way of collecting from the rich without destroying their special privileges."

But Newcomb contends that adopting the land value tax plan would end a "monopoly which prevents you from having shelter for your family or space for your enterprise unless you pay tribute to someone else for the use of that part of the earth you need."

For instance, land speculators would either have to use idle, low-taxed land or put it on the market for those who would use it—the new value system would remove their reasons for hoarding property.

Newcomb contends that the lack of taxes on structures would encourage new construction on newly available land, reduce urban sprawl by creating cheaper land within population centers, eliminate slum housing because existing tax breaks would vanish, and end the prospect of a tax penalty for improving property.

Newcomb explained that he first encountered George's philosophy as a college student staying with an uncle in Rochester, N.Y.

The uncle, a dentist, offered room and board if Newcomb would learn about George's theories.

"I did and it changed my life," Newcomb said.

When the Great Depression later soured the American dream, Newcomb said the "personal poverty" he faced might have led him to the edge of a tall bridge or to Marxism without George's beliefs.

"It sustained my belief that there could be a better future for mankind," he said.

That same universal importance Newcomb attached to the tax structure overhaul caused him during his 20 years as a real estate broker in the Melbourne area to set aside half his commissions to fund his work in Florida and nationally on behalf of George's formula.

That irony is society's greatest villain in the eyes of land value tax proponents is the real estate speculator.

The point doesn't escape Newcomb. Indeed, it was massive land acquisitions in California that allowed George to build up the endowment for a Henry George Foundation in Pittsburgh to further his work. Newcomb is an officer and trustee.

"I see tangible evidence that three or four states are ready to take the important step," Newcomb said. "It will be very interesting to see what a five-year progressive changeover will do to the economy of those states . . . and I hope it comes in my lifetime."

But Florida is not among states he believes could take that first plunge into land value tax.

Explaining that land value tax proponents only now form a united front, Newcomb uses George's words.

"The truth that I have tried to make clear will not find easy acceptance. If that could be, it would have been accepted long ago. If that could be, it would never have been obscured. But it will find friends . . . this is the power of truth."

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