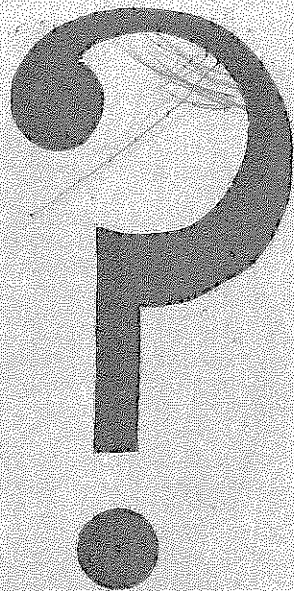


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ANSWERED

BY

C. H. L.

The
Chippie
Press
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What "Single Tax" Means

By C. H. INGERSOLL

Of the firm of Robt. H. Ingersoll & Bro., manufacturers
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YOUR editor asks why I, a business man, apparently prosperous, am a believer in the principles of Henry George and the amelioration of poverty, implying that such philosophies are logical only for the "disinherited masses."

If, within the limitations of this article, I can answer his question so he and his quarter million readers will get my viewpoint, I shall indeed be thankful.

It is obvious that no difference in attitude should exist between different groups of people, rich or poor, capitalist or laborer, toward a principle of justice or morality; all should espouse such a principle. So if the philosophy of George, now commonly known as the "Single Tax" rings true as a common factor in the uplift of humanity, it is not for any wise man no matter where he is classified, to alienate himself from it.

The complete answer to the editor's question, is in the pages of "Progress and Poverty;" or for those with limited time and disinclination for close analysis, in "Social Problems" or even the "Land Question," in each of which George unfolds, in choicest

English, the problem, divested of complexities and the remedy, so simple that even a business man cannot refuse it.

If there is one thing emphasized by the "Prophet of San Francisco," it is that a violation of natural law is absolutely universal in its baneful effects, and that an injustice perpetrated on one division of society, must react on every other division, including the presumed beneficiaries of the injustice.

It is our habit to shower too much pity on the poor and forget the many ways in which we suffer in their degradation. And how about the very rich with their overload of unspendable wealth; their responsibility; their half-conscious guilt in the possession of wealth not earned? Indeed which of the extremes shall we most commiserate?

The more I live and study both extremes, the more I am in doubt on this point, with slight inclination to think the rich really the poorer.

And what of the middle class with its sure, if slow, tendency to gravitate to the lower ranks, despite its constant desire to climb at any cost into the upper? Is theirs an ideal condition? No, we have a seething mass of unrest which satisfies neither the moralist, patriot nor business man. No level headed business man can contemplate the social conditions of today with any feeling of security, not to say optimism, and that there is every reason to fear a cataclysm, which will put an end to all business schemes, unless we

who can command ourselves, take up—not the cause of the masses only—but the common cause, and clear away the confusions and complexities that now enmesh us, and go straight for *the remedy*.

We have not many more decades for groping; we cannot excuse ourselves for not studying, knowing and acting. "Too late" is a familiar warning that may well give us pause, as we all concede we are going *some*—but whither?

"Know thyself" is a wise maxim applied to bodily conditions; its application to conditions of the body politic cannot be construed as pessimism except by those who make "optimism" a profession—those who believe that "what is, is right;" true optimism can only be based on a complete self-knowledge and a frank acknowledgement of existing weakness.

So I say, it is for us business men to be on the alert in some matters not directly connected with our own counting rooms, or even with conventional philanthropies and religious functions. We are every day seeing the fruits of our indifference to things we think are abstract or remote, in the bold daylight robberies being perpetrated on us in the name of politics and finance; this points immediately to other departments of our social household which if not investigated and corrected, will surely lead us to bankruptcy.

And yet I do not concede this to be pessimism; there have been times when it would have

passed as such, but in the present enlightenment, the conditions I point to are a matter of common knowledge; but my optimism is wholly based on the Single Tax remedy.

The Single Tax theory is based on the principle recognized by leading philosophers, economists and jurists of all ages; that the earth is the heritage of the people, and that land should not be absolutely private property; even our modern governments recognize this in their law of eminent domain, and Moses, Blackstone, Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Jefferson and Herbert Spencer, have specifically declared this as a principle of justice; yet no one had discovered a practicable way of giving effect to this principle,—various schemes such as subdivision of the land among the people every ten years having been tried and found of little avail in escaping the well recognized evils of land monopoly—until George thought of the natural and easy method of perfectly working out an apportionment of nature's bounties and values created by the community, by a tax on the value of land, in place of every other tax.

I cannot here undertake to trace, as George so conclusively does, the great ruling evils of society, notably poverty, immorality and crime to land monopoly and speculation. I can only ask you to give a few hours to his matchless reasoning; here are his principle premises: that crime and degradation are effects, not causes; that poverty creates directly and indirectly, substantially all society's ills; that

poverty, at least in its extremes, is unnecessary and due to the power given to the few to command service of the many; that all we have proceeds from the land, and therefore power is given to the land owner over those who do not own it.

This may be seen, directly, in the case of a *landlord* and tenant; the former may live in idleness and luxury, and the latter must struggle to the utmost for bare existence; but it is also to be seen in many indirect ways not easily discovered, but more far reaching, as for example, the great railroads exercising a blighting effect in making high rates, or building up impregnable monopolies by secret contracts, while enjoying with a nominal tax, the almost priceless franchises of the people, or the great mineral, mining or oil monopolies, taking billions of wealth from the earth—"the heritage of the people." But the greatest of all land value is found in the great cities, as for instance, in New York City, the land alone is worth more than all property of every kind in the balance of New York State.

All of which roughly shows the gigantic proportions of this common fund of value, which as has been in all ages acknowledged, and as any healthy mind can see, is created by the people collectively, and belongs to them, but is now appropriated by those privileged to "own land."

It should not be inferred that normal land ownership is charged with this burden of crime against society; that is, ownership ac-

accompanied with legitimate use in directly obtaining a living from the soil, as for example, the working farmer or the modest house owner; nor in any form of industry.

It is the abuse of private ownership everywhere prevailing, and which is inseparable from this institution, that works the harm; the speculative booming, amounting so often to a craze, producing highly fictitious values; and that even more damaging inaction, the mere "holding for a rise" of land under nominal taxation, while industry is compelled to pass farther on and finally crowds around, and produces a value that often yields fabulous profits to this slothfulness.

I ask you to discard all preconceptions for a moment, and note the contrast in the treatment received by industry, and by inactivity, by our present system of taxation: Unimproved land goes almost free on the theory that it is earning no income, and in disregard of the fact that it is a stumbling block, a drag on development, and is growing valuable by the industrious efforts of others. But how are these same efforts requited by the assessor? Build a house, or even paint one, or beautify your property, and you must pay a penalty! Buy a suit of clothes, a barrel of sugar or a ton of coal, and you will have paid another fine that must discourage your effort to live comfortably. Our present system is a direct encouragement to speculative inaction, and at every turn a blow at honest industry. In other words, our ignorance of scientific tax-

ation is responsible for the one great fundamental evil under which we are staggering—not knowing, because we do not study, that the complete remedy is within easy reach.

At first you may say individual ownership is necessary to individual ambition, and that to own a piece of the earth is an inalienable longing of humanity. Reflection will show you that this is but a matter of form, as the proposed system would make more secure than at present, the *possession and use of land* if such were the object of "owning," and it would only intervene if the object were *possession and non-use* for the purpose of preventing use by others, except on terms made by its possessor.

In fact the "single tax" would not disturb existing titles to land at all, but by surrounding *users* of land with fair conditions, not now existing, would make them absolutely secure. The force of the change would fall on those non-users or partial users of tracts they are holding for advance in price. For example, of two adjoining pieces of land, one is occupied by a building and other improvements, and the other is in its raw, natural state; the owner of the first pays a high tax on every building and its contents; on even his fences, ditches, grading, etc., and also a high tax on the land itself, while his neighbor pays a *low* tax on the land alone. The single tax would remove all tax from the improvements and take the full rental value of the land only, without considering in the slightest degree the

improvements, thus lowering the tax paid by owner No. 1. The tax on the unimproved plot would be increased three or four times, bringing it to the actual economic value, corresponding to the adjoining land.

And what would be the net result of this? First, an industrious man's taxes would be lowered, and he would be encouraged to make further improvements. Second, the "dog in the manger" would realize that there was no longer any profit in holding land idle, so he would use it, build upon it, cultivate it, and employ labor, thus raising wages. Third, another house would be in the market, lowering rents for houses, and more produce would be sent to market, contributing to cheaper prices for such. Fourth, as the revenues from land would more than suffice for all expense of government, every other tax would be abated, so the general public would actually be exempt from taxation! The land would take care of it all, and justly so, because these same people have made every dollar of these values.

It would naturally be suggested that a proposition to tax land values only,—which to the casual student would mean taxing land only—would place the tax burden heavily on the farmer, the principal land owner; but such would not be the result, which illustrates the great distinction between land and land values. Apparently the farmer owns nearly all the land, but from the standpoint of *value*, the city owners have it nearly all, which demon-

strates the main eternal verity of the George ideas, namely, that the people make the values; relatively, farm land, the bare land before being touched with the ax, hoe or plow has little value; the value of improvements, which includes everything on or in the bare original land, far exceeds the land value, so that the exemption of these would far more than offset the land value tax, and bring about a net reduction in the farmers' tax.

By "farmer" I mean the average "working farmer" with a farm not so large that he can't work it well with the assistance of his sons and incidental hiring; the consolidated farms, worked largely by machinery and hired labor, where improvement values were largely exceeded by land values, would naturally and justly pay a larger proportionate tax which again proves the true democracy of the plan as applied to the farmer.

Accordingly a business man should be a Single Taxer; because the wise business man knows that whatever opposes the tendency to centralization, consolidation, elimination of the individual as a factor in production, contributes to an *insurance of the future welfare of this nation*, including its business interests.

Now, as to the effects in cities and their suburbs; we in New York, have now reached 50 stories in our buildings, adjoining which are frequently found either vacant lots or three story rookeries. In this respect we are a freak town, and why is it? Land speculation of the double back action kind, is the reason;

it has produced such inverted pyramid of fictitious values, that a plot for building *costs* so much that the only way to get square is to go up into the heavens; at the same time the *tax* on adjoining unimproved or badly improved plots, is so *low* as to encourage the independently situated owners to maintain for years what should be regarded as public nuisances, in old uninhabitable structures in our finest sections.

And what would the "S. T." do here? First, no one, even the Astors, could afford to hold an idle piece long; they would have to be built on forthwith, with the effects on wages and rents already noted. There are 327 square miles of land in Greater New York no more than one-fifth of which is or ever has been built upon. Second, no one could long afford to maintain inferior buildings (and at least one-half those here are in no wise consistent with their locality.) Result, general improvement of the city, plus results to labor and renters. Third, the income from this new source would displace all other taxes, and in addition run all the street railways far into the suburbs *free of cost to the travelers*, just as our buildings run free elevators; also build libraries and art galleries, parks, boulevards and other improvements never dreamed of, and probably finish by paying to each individual citizen, a cash dividend on his community property—and this is no pipe dream, but a statement of hard demonstrable fact! Do you blame a business man for being a Single

Taxer? This is just plain business sense—not altruism, humanitarianism or anything of that sort. There is not a business man or legitimate capitalist that would not follow me if he knew what I have found out—and there *are* a lot of us know it already.

Further results can better be imagined than set down; the city would spread and with it every unit of business and dwelling; everyone would enjoy comfortable surroundings; with the diffusion of land values over the larger area would come great reduction thereof in the congested centers, and the impetus to 50 story freaks would be wanting, and approximate uniformity with complete sanity in building construction would obtain; a properly engineered system of transit would follow the elimination of the "big fours" of Wall Street exploitation, and a well housed suburban dwelling people would quickly mass themselves daily in Manhattan for business, and in due course the tenement habit would be cured, or at least become cleanly; the people coming into their own and gradually realizing that all was not hopeless; that they were not after all born to create wealth for the Astors, Goelets and Hoffmans, or even our cherished *other* Trinity, would become what they all want to be, citizens of the highest type.

Do you blame a business man for being a Georgite when such visions are supported by a cold blooded analysis of the facts?

A great obstacle in our country to an understanding of the Single Tax idea is that our

areas of land are so vast, and even in and near our greatest cities, big lots, acres and square miles of idle land are seen, and a railway trip takes us through hundreds of miles of practically unoccupied territory; all this blinds the average eye to the real principle involved, and they point to this land and say, "there's plenty of land in our country; let people go to it; the land question is for England or Ireland—not for *our* great country."

But please follow me: First, it is land speculation that produces this big show of apparently undesired land; there is active demand and urgent need for it, but our system places a discouraging and often prohibitive price on it. Next, and most important, is to get untwisted on the distinction between *land* and *land values*. The Single Tax has nothing to do with land as such, but only that land which has a substantial value, either natural, as a mine, or created by population, as in a great city; and in each case the land monopoly *works out in full* its baneful results, whether in New York City, in the mountains of Nevada, or in England or Ireland; in other words, land monopoly means individual lots or tracts and in any community of sufficient size to give its land a value, the same ratio of injustice exists as in the largest city where the gigantic figures make it so obvious as to compel the attention of the most supine.

Or to state the case another way: Generally speaking, people in communities combine on a fairly uniform scale in creating land

values, and therefore each individual may be said to have an equal interest in them; therefore, the "land question" in its most urgent phase, becomes a mere question of population in cities and towns and when we say that in our country we have as many urban dwellers as England, which is doubtless more than true, we have shown the land question to be of equal importance to us, irrespective of the fact that our total land area may be a hundred times as great; and also of the fact that poverty is keener there; so it may be safely accepted that questions of land monopoly, unearned increment, land values, taxation, ground rents, etc., as the subject is variously alluded to, are of universal application and importance, varying only in slight degree. To say "let the people go to the country if they want land" begs the whole question; they are living on land here in the city as truly as if they were farming and they claim as their own the value they have thus created in *this* land; and also the collateral benefits that will result from the freeing of *all* land from the embargo now resting on its use.

There is much confusion of ideas and definitions, which, in the average mind unused to economic subjects, interferes with that ready understanding and acceptance of the Single Tax, which its simplicity should invite. The term "land monopoly" for example, is confusing, since "monopoly" in the usual sense, namely, the control of a whole field of industry, absolutely to the exclusion of others,

does not exist as to land; so it is necessary in understanding the land question, to bear in mind that when we speak of land monopoly we mean individual monopolization of individual portions of land which works practically the same evils as if all land were owned by one individual, the difference being only in the degree to which the rental and increment are concentrated in the hands of a few individuals, it making no difference to the non-owners whether their rent is paid to one or one million persons.

As showing the extent to which our present system *tends* to concentrating the land *toward* the ownership of one individual, note the following facts as to the distribution of wealth in the United States:

		FAMILY AVERAGE
8,417,612 families own	\$4,715,000,000	\$ 560
6,313,209 " "	22,632,000,000	3,585
1,452,847 " "	51,953,000,000	35,000
4,047 " "	15,000,000,000	3,000,000

Another confusion damaging to this cause hinges on the interpretation of the terms "land monopoly" and the proposition of "making land common property" by which term the George theory is often loosely stated.

No one more fully appreciates than did George the necessity for the absolute individual possession and control of land, and yet it is a common notion that his plan would involve a "division of land among everybody" and in destruction of the ancient, natural and laudable human desire to "own a home;" in fact all that is perversion, but to understand that, close distinctions are needed.

First, the term land monopoly, must be clearly understood. The next distinction necessary is between land ownership for purposes of speculation by holding it idle for advance in value, or for the collection of rents, and *ownership for the purpose of using it*; then we must have clearly in mind that there is no suggestion of any division of the land, any government ownership, any common ownership, or anything else but the one simple proposition of increasing the tax on the *bare land value*, up to the point where the full economic rents, which is the price it could be rented for, is practically all absorbed in taxation.

This would destroy monopoly for the purpose of *speculation*, but it would make more secure possession for the purpose of *use*; the first, because the speculator could not afford to pay this heavy tax, and must therefore either become a productive user of his land, or give it up to someone who would use it; and the second, because of the assurance that under the new system the land would never be taxed at more than its own bare value, no matter how much it was improved, whereas under our existing system a portion of every improvement is confiscated by taxation and also the land tax is increased for no other reason than its improvement by the owner, and the dangers of eventual loss of ownership and possession by sale for taxes is far greater to the *active* owner under the present system than it could be under the Single Tax; the

slothful owner is the one protected at present, as *you* can see by looking around you at the idle tracts which industry is compelled to pass around, the community to tolerate as an eye sore, and menace, and the municipality to police, light, build sewers, sidewalks, and streets, around, as if it were serving the people instead of filching from them.

And the only sense in which the land would be "made common property" is that only where *land value* exists, to the extent that rent would be paid for its use, that rent would be taken by the Single Tax and applied (in place of all other taxes now existing) to the common benefit of the whole community; but there would be no physical division or disturbance of possession, or increase in the taxes of users of land.

This is the important dividing line between the Single Tax and Socialism with which it is commonly confused, when it is the *direct opposite*; the Socialists would take over and apportion under an elaborate scheme of centralized government, not only all land, but all industry of every form, while Single Taxers would work out the most fundamental desideratum of the Socialists, namely, a substantial division of the land (by the distribution of *land values*) with scarcely a change in our present system of appraisal and tax collection; and from this change, which would do violence to no industrial interest, would follow a correction of all the industrial and social evils pointed out

by the Socialists, leaving intact individual possession, ownership, initiative and enterprise, obviously necessary to modern society.

The terms "landlord," "land," and "land value" should be closely defined in relation to this subject. *Landlord* means; not the renter of a house as in our city life, but the owner of land as best exemplified by the great lords of England; *land* means only the ground divested of every improvement in or on it; a ditch is as much an improvement as a house. The *value of land* or *land value* means all value inherent in the bare land, either the value attaching to a favored location, to the contents of the land as oil or mineral; or to the increment due to surrounding population; but in no case any value due to human labor expended on or in it in improvements; it is this land value which the Single Tax aims to distribute as their common property, among all the people, in the form of governmental service, due them as compensation for the privilege of use of these favored locations.

It is not always easy for the student to see just how the Single Tax would "land;" that is, just who it would help, and at the expense of whom. It is the unfortunate habit of the age to indulge in public measures which help one class at the expense of another, and sometimes worthier, class, and without much thought of principles involved. Is the Single Tax such a measure; is it to rob Peter and pay Paul; is it a raid on riches; is it an appeal to class prejudice; is it demagogic?

No, analysis shows it to have none of the predatory features of our systems, which notoriously rob the producer and give to the non-producer; it appeals to enlightenment and common sense, with a background of humanitarianism and morality, it urges the discontinuance of the many forms of robberies of Peter to pay Paul.

Now, just whom will it benefit, and at whose expense? It is obvious that the benefits would fall on everyone engaged in productive industry, mental or physical, with their hands or capital; directly, to those desiring to apply their efforts directly to the land, as the new system uncovers natural opportunities to their free use, and indirectly, but in no less degree, to all others who in sympathy would reflect the direct benefits. Not all would desire to occupy land now held idle which would be freed to use, but none would escape the benefits of the vast expansion that would ensue, as this occupation would start an era of healthy production, of unprecedented activity and wages would rise as a whole; inequalities and abnormalities in wages now to some extent existing, would be equalized; the labor slave driver would lose his power to unjustly crowd wages down; and the walking delegate would lose his power of oppression to the capitalist, as unions in their present futile and objectionable form would be displaced by a common recognition of labor's just and natural rights, due to a free working of the law of wages, where natural opportunities are open;

capital and labor would meet on a properly understood basis agreeable to economic law, each knowing its rights and limitations.

And whom will it hurt? If those named below (in their monopolistic phase only) are "a class" within the meaning of the "class prejudice" charge, of course, the Single Tax will be to this extent a class measure, so I would direct your attention to an analysis of this class of leeches, and to what is proposed regarding them, unless our plan is accepted.

First, the land monopolists. Who are they? W. W. Astor owns from 500 to 1,000 million dollars in unearned increment, *earned* by the millions of Greater New York. The U. S. Steel Corporation basis its fabulous capitalization principally on the ore lands owned, rather than on its industrial assets; the coal trust owes its ability to pay its own price for miners and exact its own price for coal, wholly to its ownership of most of the available natural supply; our rapidly merging system of railroads owe their fabulous profits and over capitalization to the absence of taxation on valuable lands they own; these are each examples of a sub-class interested in unearned increment. Some make unearned increment their "business," notably the Astor type; such would be heavily affected by the Single Tax; others are interested equally in monopoly and industry, and so would perhaps gain more in industry than lose in monopoly, which shows how the Single Tax would, while driving an individual out of the monopoly

business, thus compelling him to engage in legitimate business, offer him business inducements by relief from taxation, thus more than offsetting his losses, making a *wholly* useful citizen of him, and setting up in the community for its general benefit, an industry in place of an obstructive monopoly.

To sum up, those injured, would be solely those who make a business of land speculation or whose industrial monopoly rests on landed privileges; all others who engaged in this only incidentally or even equally to other interests, would be benefitted as much or more in their other legitimate interests. And broadly the pure monopolists would not in the end be sorry for the change, though it would cost them dollars, as when they saw the general benefits to civilization they would join in justification of what to them seemed injustice.

It is but human to worship, or at least respect success, and it is natural that questions should occur such as these: "Will the Single Tax be accepted?" "Is it one of the beautiful theories that will never be?" It is sometimes remarked that in nearly thirty years since "Progress and Poverty" was given the world, no apparent progress has been made by the movement.

But let us see if this is not more apparent than real; that the works of George have had wide circulation and thoughtful attention is unquestioned, and that they are and have been consistently regarded with respect is

unquestioned; that his position has not been successfully or even pretentiously challenged.

His ideas have generally permeated the thinking mass in all civilized countries, is shown by daily development in political, social and educational life. Some of the evidences I will mention, and if my statement is correct there needs to be but a crystallization to place the movement in effective form.

First to consider are the personal representatives of the movement; these are variously estimated at from 250,000 to a million in this country today—men who have accepted the George principle, and among these are prominent men in every walk of life, such as Tom L. Johnson, Brand Whitlock, Mayor Taylor of San Francisco, Ex-Governor Garvin of Rhode Island, Congressman Champ Clark of Missouri, Mayor Rose of Kansas City, Wm. Loyd Garrison, John DeWitt Warner, Geo. Foster Peobody, Judges Seabury and Ford (New York), Poultney Bigelow, Hamlin Garland, Elbert Hubbard.

The next evidence is that in every progressive political or social movement Single Taxers will be found in the foreground, and as a rule their measures are in evidence as forerunners of the real work to come; they have been the principle promoters of Municipal Ownership, of the Initiative and Referendum, of ballot and primary reform, of franchise taxation, of "equal taxation" in New Jersey and "just taxation" in Wisconsin, involving mainly the principle of the Single Tax.

That they are the acknowledged authorities on taxation is evident by the fact that at all conferences relating to the subject, they take the leading part; Lawson Purdy, a leading Single Taxer, is in charge of the assessments of Greater New York, the most responsible position of its kind in the world.

In all of the great reform movements—in Philadelphia, Cleveland, Toledo, Chicago, Pittsburg, St. Louis and San Francisco—the Single Taxer is always found in the front or in fighting ranks, and many prominent members of our present federal administration are Single Taxers; they have full credit for the Free Alcohol Bill, and for killing the ship subsidy, and are now pushing Parcels Post with success in sight. In the language of a wise Republican politician when asked what he could see in the future of politics, “the Single Tax crowd are the only ones with a definite aim and who are getting anywhere.”

Their work is chiefly by indirection at present, and they appreciate that years may pass before a direct issue may be presented, but surely, if slowly, the great truths are spreading, and will one day be the bulwark of civilization's security. When our rapid evolution reaches a crisis and society is suspended on the brink of ruin, as it may some day be, it will be the Single Tax propaganda now going so quietly, that will supply the alternative to revolution or to a Socialism, worse even than the present order of inequality and concentration. Under favor-

able circumstances, however, the risks of any crisis need not be taken as with but slight constitutional changes, and in some states none, the change to the Single Tax may be made locally in cities or in whole states at any time, and efforts in this direction are being persistently made.

The movement in the old world is important to recognize as indicating the universality of the principles. In England, in 1907, I listened to a clear cut debate of the Single Tax in the House of Commons, which would pass a full adoption of it, but for the House of Landlords, as the full Cabinet and a majority of the Commons were elected for that purpose, and therefore, this movement must first change that survival of feudalism, the House of Peers, before the will of the people can find expression in a Single Tax law. In Germany the Single Tax principle is in full operation in over 300 cities. In New Zealand this principle has also been recognized in a general law, though in both these cases but a small portion of land value is taken which minimizes the results shown.

So if the progress of our Remedy is slow, so also has been that of the disease. “Rome was not built in a day,” is so often repeated that it should be also a reminder of the *fate* of Rome, following conditions almost exactly duplicated in our present civilization; that these conditions are not, in all their worst respects exhibited in our own great country should count but slightly because, first, our

fight should be for humanity, not for a nation, and second, there is no quarantine strong enough to protect us from the fate of any other nation and decades, even centuries count for little in the long run of time. We cannot shut out the spectacle of the tramp, the starving and slaving women and children, and the multi-millionaire even here at home. At all events every decent citizen is dissatisfied with conditions, however little inclined to pessimism or radicalism and to such I humbly appeal in this article.