

Mike Curtis' Speech in honor of Henry George Birthday, September 12, 2021

When Henry George died, in 1897, it was just 3 years before the beginning of Arden

The **Commentators** disagreed on whether it was the largest funeral in New York history, **or the** largest since the death of Abraham Lincoln.

The New York Times reported, that "Not even Lincoln had a more glorious death."^[54]

Yet today, I think it is fair to say, the Henry George Movement might just have to hurry up in order to stop.

It was **About** 50 years ago, when I went to my first conference. **I met**, a middle aged guy, and he said how pleased he was to make my acquaintance.

He told me how up to then he'd been the youngest guy in the movement, **and he'd** been the youngest guy for 25 years.

Well, there were **several** younger people who came into the movement soon after that.

The size of the movement ebbs and flows.

And today, there are probably thousands of people who sincerely believe in the Single Tax, **throughout** the world, and **may** be even within the United States — **Of course**, that's out of 325 million people.

However, I would be surprised if anyone could name more than a few hundred people in the whole world **who** are actively teaching classes, writing articles or introducing legislation for land value taxation.

There is something about private property in land that seems sacrosanct.

And that is why — **no** matter how well you can explain how land **speculation** causes unemployment, a shortage of housing, low wages, and recurring recessions,

and how the Single Tax **or even** land value taxation **will counteract it** — the answer you will get 999 times out of a thousand is: "that was interesting".

I have had countless people sit in my classes for 10, 20, and even 30 weeks. **And at the** end, they say: "That was really interesting"

A woman interviewed me the other day for a TV show. She said you explained that very well — "that was very. interesting" **I said**: Why don't you say: it was profound?

After all, **I just** told you how to cure the worlds most intractable problems. **And** she said: "**well**, I don't think there is any chance that it will actually be adopted".

And I say to you: **that is** the reason most people will not work for its adoption, **even when** they think it would work —

because they don't think the legislation could possibly pass. **And no one** wants to whip a dead horse.

I think there are three groups of people who have taken the Henry George courses. **First**, there are a small number of people who simply do not get it.

Even after listening to someone explain the Henry George Thesis for ten weeks,

I'll be presenting diplomas to everyone who has attended the required sessions, and asking for a critique of their experience. **someone** will usually admit they don't get it.

Now after ten weeks, I can't stop the proceedings and debrief them, **but I would** sure like to know exactly what it is they do not get.

Is it that we can't live without land?

Is it that private property in land enables landowners to take what other people produce?

Is it that land speculation creates an artificial shortage of land — **eliminating the** free opportunity, and driving wages and interest to a minimum?

Is it that taxing the value of land will eliminate land speculation, create jobs and housing, and raise wages?

I may never know.

The second group are afraid they must have missed the flaw. **It sounds good, really good. In fact,** it sounds too good to be true. **Therefore,** — it almost certainly is.

And finally, there are those who are absolutely sure it will work — **and work** perfectly — **but they** are equally sure that the people who own and run this country will never let it happen.

And, in our lifetime or any time in which there is any memory of us, they are probably right.

So, why would anyone expend their time, give up status and friends, **when it** has no chance at all of being adopted?

I **don't** think anyone is silent because they are intimidated. **If there** were thousands of people who were listening to us and taking us seriously, then yes,

I **do** think we would be attacked in many ways, **but I** don't think there are any landlords or speculators who are worried about us right now. — — —

Speaking for myself. I **have** no expectations **the** Single Tax will be enacted while I am still alive.

Some times we get a little shift in local taxes. **and when it happens it is** very exciting.

But, my focus is on spreading this vitally important understanding. **And** in the process, I **hope** to inspire teachers, and advocates.

I **Would** join the tens of thousands of people who are working for Election Reform. **It is essential** that everyone can vote in a Democratic Republic.

But the truth is: **the** majority of people who are, and will still be allowed to vote, **even with** these atrocious exclusionary laws — **live** by the fruits of their labor.

And, If they knew what policies were in their best interest, **they** would surely elect people **who** would put them into practice. (Pause)

I **would** work for money & banking reform; after all Inflation is robbery.

And Patent reform; **are not the** drug companies the new Robber Barrons

Or the elimination of taxes on wages.

That is, I would work for these movements — if I didn't know in advance, **that if** they succeed —

Money becomes a stable measure and store of value;

Prescriptions become cheaper;

taxes are lowered, or prices fall,

The rent of land will increase by the same amount, **and the landlords** will get all of the gains.

(Pause)

And, I'm not going to work for the **\$15 per hour** Min. Wage. **Or** Medicare for all.

Beneficial as they would be, **they are** trying to ameliorate the affects of private property in land.

They are trying to improve the condition of the wage slave — **they are not trying** to set him free.

I am totally in favor of these reforms, **but they** don't create jobs or housing, **and they are** not a solution to our fundamental problems.

When the majority of people understand the Henry George thesis, **we will** have the Single Tax.

Therefore, I will put my efforts into supporting teachers and advocates.

You have to explain this thesis a lot of times **before you end** up with a Henry George teacher **and a** Single Tax advocate.

You never know who it will be; **so, like** the Fuller Brush man, **you** knock on every door; **you** explain it to everyone who will listen.

I have no doubt that the Single Tax will be adopted some day. **That** is simply because neither capitalism nor socialism nor any combination of the two, **which is what** is practiced all over the world today, >

have any chance of delivering the equal opportunity, freedom, and prosperity that, **we know, instinctively,** is possible, given the current level of technology.

In what millennium it will be adopted, I have no idea, **but, like** some other great reforms, it may well come when its advocates least expect it.

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Some years ago, **Rodney** Jester gave me a bumper sticker with a quote from Thomas Jefferson.

I know he did not have the courage of his convictions, **but he did** have some pretty good **insights**.

He says: **If a** nation expects to be ignorant and free, **in a state of** civilization, **it expects** what never was **and** never will be“

Which brings me to our current state of political affairs.

The Republicans think that land is capital, and call it property, as in the hated: Property Tax.

And — other than **insuring** private property, **Republicans** still believe: “**The** government that governs least, governs best”.

Oh, I know except for abortion and recreational drugs.

They say: let the free market dictate the distribution of wealth, **and** keep taxes to a minimum.

We should rely on a flat percentage **of** income, or sales.

The rich would still pay more, **because** their income and level of consumption are proportionately greater.

A graduated income tax, they say, is **class warfare**. **It is promoted** by people who envy other people's ambition, hard work, **and** success.

They do not think that Jeff Bassos got rich by taking any profits that his employees actually produced.

Now, the Democrats also think that land is capital, **and call** it property. **But they do** believe **the outcomes** must be **ameliorated** with graduated income taxes, capital gains taxes, estate and inheritance taxes.

Republicans think: **if business** wasn't throttled with needless regulations, **free** enterprise would create ample opportunities for employment and housing.

Democrats think that government **must** intervene with health, safety, and environmental regulations, **publicly** funded education, **Minimum** Wage laws, **Social** Security and Medicare.

They also think that it is necessary to redistribute over 4% of the **total** production of the country in welfare.

And because the more that is spent on welfare, **the** more it seems there is a need for welfare,

the conservative Republicans believe that most of the chronically unemployed would find jobs and work **if** **they** weren't paid to sit home and do nothing.

The rich are rich, **they say**, because for generations they have saved, invested, and worked like hell.

"**If the** poor would spend as much time working as they spend complaining, they would have something".

Neither political party understands the difference between the opportunities of nature, **and** the products of human endeavor — **between** the results of individual exertions **and** the synergistic results of the conscious and sub-conscious cooperation of the community as a whole.

And because of it, I am often reminded of these prophetic words of Henry George,

The reform I have proposed (he says) accords with all that is politically, socially, or morally desirable.

It has the qualities of a true reform, **for it** will make all other reforms come easier.

What is it but the carrying out in letter and spirit of the truth enunciated in the Declaration of Independence — **the "self-evident"** truth that is the heart and soul of the Declaration —

"**That all** men are created equal;

that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; **that** among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness!"

These rights are denied when the equal right to land — **on which** and by which men alone can live — is denied.

Equality of political rights will not compensate for the denial of the equal right to the bounty of nature.

Political liberty, when the equal right to land is denied, becomes, as population increases and invention goes on, merely the liberty to compete for employment at starvation wages.

This is the truth that we have ignored.

And so there come beggars in our streets and tramps on our roads;

and poverty enslaves men who we boast are political sovereigns;

and want breeds ignorance that our schools cannot enlighten;

and citizens vote as their masters dictate;

and the demagogue usurps the part of the statesman;

and gold weighs in the scales of justice;

and in high places sit those who do not pay to civic virtue even the compliment of hypocrisy;

and the pillars of the republic that we thought so strong already bend under an increasing strain.