

Preface

Why this essay? I'm a libertarian. I believe that the ideas embodied by the libertarian movement in general, and the Libertarian Party in particular, represent humanity's only hope for a future worth living. But I also think the Libertarian Party and the majority of today's libertarians (along with almost everyone else) are wrong about a seemingly insignificant, but fundamental aspect of political philosophy — our system of ownership of land and other natural resources — and have strayed far from our classical liberal roots. I believe that a recognition of this aberration, and a return to our roots, will open up a common ground, of economic freedom and justice, on which freedom lovers of all persuasions — left, right, and libertarian — may join together in an unbeatable coalition. The future is ours for the taking, if only we'll all do a *bit* more studying! This essay is written toward that end.

I was introduced to the concept of land value tax (LVT) gradually, through the patient efforts of Dan Sullivan, while we both worked with many other freedom lovers to develop the Libertarian Party of Pittsburgh during the period from 1992 to the present. Several of the arguments presented here are ones he made to me. And, if you're a libertarian who wants a concise presentation of these ideas, I highly recommend Dan's essay entitled "*Are You a Real Libertarian or a **Royal** Libertarian?*" (It's available electronically on his web site, or in print form from the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation — for both, see "Web Sites of Interest," p.113.)

One indication of how much my thinking has changed over the past few years is that I used to be outraged that I didn't really *own* my own land: failure to pay my property taxes could result in a "Sheriffs Sale" of my home. "I'm just renting from the government!", I fumed. But now, I don't think I or anyone else should be allowed to own land free and clear of all obligation to the rest of humanity. Before, I thought a "head tax" was probably the most appropriate way to fund government; everyone should pay the same amount because, I thought, we all get the exact same benefits

from the valid functions of government. Now, I think it's absolutely essential that each holder of land pay a *net site value rent* (i.e., LVT), which is the location value of his land minus the value he adds to that of the rest of the community. If he contributes more than he gets, then the community owes him something in return (a "land value rebate").

A major benefit of this transformation I've undergone is that, for the first time, I could have an effective dialogue with liberals about economic matters. Previously, I thought they had absolutely no leg to stand on. I thought 100% of our economic problems came from their so-called "Progressive" Movement. But now, I could see that a) there *was* such a thing as monopoly *not* caused by Big Brother Government (it was caused even by our small, 19th century government), and b) there *was* a problem with our form of capitalism, as its allowance of some to monopolize natural resources amounted to a rather vicious denial of everyone else's inherent right of free and equal access to Nature's Bounty. (In fact, it was our small, 19th century government's allowance of such monopoly which led to the extreme degree of social and economic injustice that fueled the Progressive Movement.)

As proof of the general significance of such a personal, intellectual transformation, I offer the example of what has happened here in Pittsburgh over the past seven years. Starting with one advocate of LVT, Dan Sullivan, we've had a steady progression of libertarian converts, each of whom has been inspired to run for public office with LVT as a major campaign issue (the converts who haven't run yet are only college age — give them time!). And, they constitute the majority of Pittsburgh-area libertarians who *have* run for public office. They include Mike Goldman (Wilkesburg mayoral race in 1993 and Pennsylvania State House in 1994), this author (Pittsburgh City Council in 1995 and State Senate in 1998), Ron Rosenberger (1998, State Senate), and in 1999, Robert Chesnavich (Allegheny County Council) and Andy Corkan (County Council At-Large). What caused these individuals to step forward and run? I think it was the added knowledge that they actually have something to offer *everyone* — a full measure of liberty and justice for all, both in one's personal life and one's economic life. Wouldn't you just *love* to be able to establish a rapport with liberals—even outright socialists — about economics? To be able to agree with them that, yes, there's something wrong at the base of our capitalist system (though

there's nothing wrong with capitalism *per se*)? To agree with them that the system grinds down and oppresses the working poor? To be able to understand why socialists view capitalist centers of wealth creation as inherently despicable — as centers of injustice where "the rich guy steals from the workers and gets away with it"? They're wrong, of course, but not as utterly wrong as I used to think. I used to view socialists, almost literally, as mentally defective: "How can anyone with a brain have such a misperception of reality?" But now I no longer have such a dim view of many of my fellow human beings. It's quite a relief, and also explains why many others often have such a dim view of us libertarians and *our* mental abilities: it's a case of misperception and ignorance all around, where all sides stand in need of enlightenment.

Achieving this happy state of mind is not easy, but extremely worthwhile, and you can do it by adhering *more* strictly to libertarian principles, not by abandoning them. Read on! Liberals do have a leg to stand on — they just don't know what it is. You can be the one to tell them!

Who is this essay written for? While I'm writing this mostly for self-professed libertarians, I'm also keeping in mind that some readers may be merely curious about libertarianism. By showing the sorts of arguments libertarians make to one another, and focusing on libertarian principles, it is my hope that others may be persuaded that they, too, are libertarians at heart.

Note: In this essay, classical liberals will sometimes be referred to as *libertarians*. Also, the word *land* will occasionally be used in its economic sense, of referring to all natural resources. The phrase *land value tax* will usually be abbreviated as LVT. It is synonymous with "community collection of ground-rent." (To learn exactly what I mean by this, and especially to appreciate its voluntary nature, see p.97, "How would LVT work?") Importantly, the word *monopoly* will be applied to our current system of land ownership, even though there is no "one" (mono) owner. Why this is an appropriate use of the word should become clear in the sections on Mark Twain and Winston Churchill. Finally, the word *geo-libertarian* is often used, and refers to both the "left libertarian" concern for how "the goods" are divvied up (in this case, the earth, i.e., "geo"), and the immense love and admiration most of us who've read Henry George feel

for him and his ideas on land. So, rather than "left libertarians" or "Georgist libertarians," we call ourselves "geo-libertarians."