

Nationalization

The fear has often been expressed that public collection of land rental would be or would result in land nationalization.

That depends on what is meant by the term "nationalization."

If it were to mean that the government would operate or control land, prescribing its use, allotting it as in the U.S.S.R. to state-selected users, issuing permits to do this with it and prohibitions against doing that with it; if it arrogated to government the right to stick its shovel into the user's affairs, capriciously or through some crooked deal displacing him in behalf of some political favorite—certainly if the public collection of land rental involved these

evil things, the whole idea would be utterly repugnant and its proponents, being sound, sensible citizens, would be the first to reject it. But the simple collection of the land-rental value—without disturbing our titles, without interfering with our use of the land we occupy, without *fining* us for putting a building on it or otherwise improving it, without inquisitional snooping into the figures of legitimate business and service, is quite another matter.

If by nationalization is meant simply the paying of the land rental, it is not very different in this respect from the present system, because at present our land, our improvements, and our incomes are all subject to a *first lien of the government* for tax collection. To put it another way, if you were to try the simple experiment of failing to pay your current property taxes for a year or two, you would find that your land, your house, and your very bed were already “nationalized” quite as much as land would be if *only land rent* were to be collected by the government.

But the reader may insist, “Still, the land would belong to the state!” No, the land would belong to the title holder, just as it does now, as long as he paid his land tax into the common treasury for the good of all. But if you prefer to contend that the land would belong to the state and not to you and that you would only be renting it—where’s the harm in that? Any argument against that is equally applicable to the present, because you are now no more than renter. If you do not pay your taxes, out you go! Rockefeller built Rockefeller Center on rented land. San Francisco’s largest office building, the Russ Building, was built on rented land.