

as a matter of privilege. Similarly, the private "ownership" of public service franchises, of fishing rights and other valuable prerogatives belonging in reality to the public, is pure and simple privilege, as distinguished from natural right.

Here, then, is the conclusive reply to the plea that the necessity for public revenue involves an inevitable invasion of natural rights—the field of privilege is open to the public Treasurer. There he finds a domain in which his presence is not an affront to justice; which is, indeed, the God-appointed source of public revenue, from which he takes for the community only that which belongs to the community.

The American patriot who has a real respect for the venerable Declaration ought to hear with joy and relief that the inalienable rights of man are, after all, compatible with the practical working of democratic government; and he should consider it his first and most urgent duty to assist those who are laboring for the abolition of a system of revenue-getting which gives a flat denial to the principles of that grand old document. That legal rights rather than natural rights—special, man-bestowed privileges, rather than general God-bestowed birth-rights—should be the objects of taxation, is a proposition which, it seems to me, must commend itself to every reasonable man. It is, moreover, a proposition which is capable of being set forth in the form of a simple diagram:

If there are any who, upon examining this diagram, are still prepared to say that the prevailing system is one which ought to be maintained; that public franchises should remain in the hands of the few, with little or no compensation to the public for their value; that land should continue to be regarded, not as a God-given heritage to the children of men, but as a commodity of monopoly and speculation for the enrichment of some without equivalent to the disinherited many; that a portion of the earnings of labor, the product of individual industry, should be taken for public revenue, while the automatically created values of the public domain are absorbed by the holders of privileges—he is entitled to his opinion.

But let him at least be candid enough to join those who openly repudiate the teachings of the Declaration of Independence.

Toronto, Canada.

THE QUESTION OF PRIVATE PROPERTY IN LAND.

By ROBERT B. MARTIN.

We should fix a proper meaning to what is understood by the word land as used in the economic sense. Is it not all the forces and substances that are manifest in physical nature, such as air, heat, light, water, rock, mineral, timber, etc. I think we are agreed as to this. Now as to the other economic term "property." Does it not mean anything that man has, by the application of his labor to natural forces and substances, so shaped and formed as to minister to human desire. I apprehend that here again we still are agreed, and now from this common premise let us approach the subject of dispute, "Private property in Land."

Just here allow me to make this statement, namely, that as every kind of property or wealth contains land in some of the elemental forms heretofore mentioned, and since man can labor upon nothing other than

land, that a denial of the right of private ownership in land upon the basis that it is not a product of labor vitiates one's right of property in any kind of wealth, and further still that it undermines the institution of private ownership itself. We can no more produce a fish, stone, rock or tree than can we produce an inch of land, and to maintain that labor applied to all gives ownership to one and not the other is both illogical and also inconsistent.

The virgin tree or rock is as separable from the house as is the virgin soil separable from any kind of improvement, and this same virgin tree or rock is as little and as much the product of labor as is the virgin soil. If labor upon land does not give ownership then how may we acquire proprietorship in anything. Virgin rock, tree and mineral is just as much the common property of all mankind as is virgin soil, and if labor performed upon the same does not give ownership alike then is the position of the socialist the correct one and property becomes robbery.

If a man move the stone from a ledge or quarry and make of it a house, does the labor performed give ownership, and if so then does not the labor performed in the necessary excavating of the soil give title to the site? It appears to me that it were doing violence to logic to say that in one case it does and in the other it does not.

'Tis but superficial reasoning to argue that the site of a building and the building itself are separable things. We can no more separate them than can we separate ourselves from the air. A man that has been separated from air is no more a man; he is a corpse; and a house can only be separated from the land by making of it a balloon. Should anyone tell me that the house I now own is mine, but the land upon which it rests can never become mine, my reply is that it is impossible to grant me ownership in the house as a thing separable from its site, for the land upon which it rests is to the foundation just what the cellar wall is to the sill, and the sill to the uprights, and they in turn to the roof timbers. Why, if I were to ask you to point out just where such a structure begins you will have to assume the area of the cellar to be the base of a cone, and then if you follow this cone to its apex in the ground you may discover the exact point of the beginning of my house. It is a physical impossibility to separate a building from its site, just as it is a physical impossibility to separate the boards from the virgin timber or wood of which they are composed. And this argument applies to water or air just the same if man's economic relation to these were the same. If we lived in boats or balloons instead of houses, whether the balloon or boat were stationary or moving, the air or water upon which they rested or floated becomes inseparable from themselves.

But you say, as did Herbert Spencer in "Social Statics," if land be subject to private ownership, what are we to do were it owned by one man. Why, we single taxers have nothing to fear from such a situation, for we instantly strike an equation between his rights and our own when we demand that such an one shall return to society a sum equal to the advantages derived by the possession of our heritage.

If Mr. Spencer's backwoodsman had said in defence of his squatter claim that if he could be dispossessed of his land because he did not produce it, but merely improved it so as to satisfy his wants, then the same reasoning would separate him from any property right in the log cabin; then I think that the champion of social rights would either have to admit that private property was indefensible, or that the institution of private property in land is a physical necessity.

Suppose the hut of this backwoodsman was in dimension about 20 by 30, now to grant him a property right to this hut implies the private possession of just 600 square feet of land that have been inclosed by its walls. The difference between this grant and the one that would apply to 600 acres that had been inclosed by fencing is not of kind, but of degree.

In a case such as this it is the prerogative, nay the duty, of society to ascertain whether this individual has taken a greater degree of freedom than others, if so he has crossed the moral law. But should society dispossess him then does society cross the moral law, for the rights of all men are not greater than that of the individual.

The science of political economy is misnamed a science if in this case it does not point out just what degree of freedom the individual has exercised, and if it exceeds that of society, then it fixes the amount necessary to place the individual square with the latter.

What manner of reasoning is it that would contend that one may acquire ownership in a flower pot full of earth, and deny ownership in a flower garden? Is there any difference other than that one is fenced in by an earthen pot and the other a wooden structure?

It is my opinion that the institution of private property is in harmony with the nature of man, and its sacredness is fundamentally essential to a progressive civilization. It is not the institution of private ownership of land that has been at fault. It is private appropriation of that which an advancing civilization brings into existence, "ground rent." This is the food necessary to administer to the needs of the social organism and without which it must perish and die.

The presence of the community pressing upon sites that are variable, as to their economic advantages, produces this that we call the unearned increment, and is always measured by its economic effect, and here is where the Single Tax becomes a science in that it contends that ground rent is a communal product and presents a just method for its distribution. As understood by me it in nowise contemplates any change whatever in the relation of the land owner to the land owned. But it does most positively affect the relation of the land owner to its rental value. Here we mean to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto the people that which is the people's. I contend that under the Single Tax a man will more truly and securely enjoy private ownership or possession in the land that he actually occupies than he does to-day, for the mixing of products of labor with land values as subject alike for taxation by the present system of taxation must ever impair his tenure.

Bro. Lothrop, quoting from "Progress and Poverty," states that "if the institution of private property in land be just, then is our cause unjust." But this is not so, for the Single Tax properly understood does not affect that institution; it does not challenge the owner's right to land. What it does affect is the special privilege of the private appropriation of ground rent; in short, it means the abolition of all taxes, and in lieu of the same would publicly appropriate what the public produces, ground rent.

Property in anything, if it has any meaning, means that it belongs to the owner as against the world. For any individual, or a majority of individuals, to take or tax it, under form of law, is in essence robbery, and if the Single Tax were really a tax it could not be defended upon ethical grounds.

The only tax that man should and must pay Nature levies upon him in that he must earn his bread by the sweat of his brow; that is all that is necessary to place him in proper relationship with physical nature, and

if he would place himself in economic harmony with his fellow man he must return to society a sum equivalent to the advantages and privileges that are socially conferred upon him. This is the law of economic adaptation which if conformed to leads onward and upward; this is the law that fixes the intensity, the height and duration of a civilization. This is the law the violation of which dwarfs the very nature of man and the observance of which would make of him what might truly be said to be the noblest work of God. This, in short, is justice.

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ROBERT B. MARTIN.

REPLY BY THE EDITOR.

We print the above because it is the ablest presentation of Mr. C. B. Fillebrown's side of the controversy that has so far been elicited. It is known to our readers that our Boston friends are divided upon this point; that the agitation which Mr. Fillebrown has so ably and successfully conducted has expressly disowned any attempt to interfere with the institution of private property in land. It has refused to condemn it as inequitable, and has asserted—what of course cannot be denied—that all essential rights of the individual and of society are conserved by the taking of land values in taxation.

With this view Mr. William Lloyd Garrison, Mr. Lothrop and others take issue. The aim and purpose of the Single Tax is to destroy private property in land, which is the curse of civilization. Its purpose is to secure equal rights to land, the common heritage. Mr. Garrison holds that to conduct the agitation in terms that fail to deny the iniquity of private property in land is to minimize the strength of the forces that can ultimately be aligned in our support, and that it involves in its counsel of caution an unconscious deception unworthy of our cause.

With this view we confess ourself in sympathy, and this notwithstanding our high appreciation of Mr. Fillebrown, and of the wonderful work he has accomplished in the city of Boston, a work as important as any that has ever been done anywhere. Nor would we have him depart from his methods that have so signally and favorably influenced the public opinion and press of Boston. Its justification is its success.

It is one of the beauties of the Single Tax—like all great truths—that many roads lead to it. Mr. Thomas G. Shearman found it through the fiscal path, and Mr. George by another. And the important thing in a journey after all is not how men travel, but where they are going. And not all modes of conveyance approve themselves alike to all minds.

Mr. Martin has stated Mr. Fillebrown's position with all the skill that can be commanded. But he unconsciously falls into the phraseology that asserts the incontrovertibility of the Garrison position and denies his own. When he says if one man should, in accordance with Mr. Herbert Spencer's suggestion, own all the land, "we instantly strike an equation between his rights and our own when we demand that such a one shall return to society a sum equal to the advantages derived by the possession of our heritage," by the use of the word *our* he invalidates his position. For how comes it to be ours if land is private property, and by what right do we demand the full value of something that we assert as a private right? Ownership is inseparable from the enjoyment of all the value that it in-