

Radio Address of Col. Victor A. Rule*

May 23, 1936

GOOD AFTERNOON, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

WE count it an honor to have you in our audience today. In an adaptation of Shakespeare I say "Friends, Consumers, Taxpayers, lend me your ears." We have a story to tell which every consumer ought to hear. We make claims which every thoughtful American ought to consider.

In answer to numerous requests we are today dedicating our programme to a taxation theory which is little understood and consequently much abused. You have often heard Miss King call me a Single Taxer. I am not that according to my understanding of the term. I am not that according to the definition which many people give to this movement. So today I am going to explain this thing as I understand it and leave it up to you whether it is right or not.

Miss King, I am in your hands for examination.

MISS KING. You have guarded yourself by saying that you are a Single Taxer according to your understanding of this theory and you have also warned that the theory has been abused, I presume by friend and foe. So I begin by asking you what is this Single Tax proposal?

COL. RULE. The Single Tax proposal is this. Let's abolish all the myriad taxes which today annoy the rich and burden the poor. Let's do away with all snooping in government and all expensive tax collection systems and let's have one tax which will be simple to compute, easy to collect, because it cannot be dodged, and which will be absolutely just because everyone will pay a fair share of the cost of governments. The Single Taxers believe that this tax ought to be levied on the site value of bare land. By that I mean that they think that the tax ought to be on the value of land irrespective of the improvement on it.

MISS KING. That is interesting enough. I suppose that it has some idea back of it but, before I ask you that,

*It will be noted that the radio plan is that Col. Rule is interviewed by a young woman, Miss Sandra King, and replies to her questions. Our friend believes that he is making some progress educationally. Questions received by mail number about three thousand a year and each letter is answered, Single Tax literature sent, and the names turned over to the Henry George School as prospective enrollments. Col. Rule has just closed a series of thirty-two forum lectures which were given in three Y. M. C. A.'s and attended by about five thousand persons. During the past winter he has spoken to ninety-six forum groups, eleven P. T. A.'s, four legion meetings, thirty-eight church and twelve business groups. In all more than ten thousand have heard these addresses. Thousands of letters have gone forward to business and church leaders besides those answered over the radio. This is important work on a large scale and deserves the help and cooperation of our Chicago friends.—Editor LAND AND FREEDOM.

I would like to know who proposed this theory and when?

COL. RULE. That is a controversial question, Miss Sandra King. I personally think that this theory is written in the Law of God as we find it in the teachings of Moses. That was a long time ago, and like many of the other teachings of Moses his land laws have been more honored in the breach than in the keeping. This idea is fundamental in our American law in what is known as "Eminent Domain." But you will find the idea in more modern times expressed in the writings of Sir Thomas More in the 16th Century. You will find it proposed by such men as Thomas Paine, Herbert Spencer, Patrick Edward Dove and Edwin Burgess. All these men lived and wrote between 1736 and 1867. You will find this theory in the works of the great French economists, Quesnay and Turgot. You will find it written large in the "Wealth of Nations" by Adam Smith, but it was really made to live by a great American, Henry George, who wrote it in his book "Progress and Poverty."

MISS KING. Does Henry George give any indication of what led him to write this book?

COL. RULE. Yes, he does. It is an interesting story which time will not permit me to tell but I do have time to quote from George himself. He says in his last chapter: (I quote)

"I have in this inquiry followed the course of my own thought. When, in mind, I set out on it I had no theory to support, no conclusion to prove. Only, when I first realized the squalid misery of a great city, it appalled me and tormented me, and would not let me rest, for thinking of what caused it and how it could be cured."

MISS KING. Those are certainly noble and unselfish sentiments. Now will you tell us what the theory is that the Single Tax rests on?

COL. RULE. The Single Tax rests on the idea that all men have an equal right to the use of the common heritage—the earth. Henry George said: "The equal right of all men to the use of land is as clear as their equal right to breathe the air." That is true as I see it. What a terrible world this would be were it possible for some Melon or Rockefeller to get a monopoly of the air and hang meters around our necks to measure how much we used so that they could grow rich charging for that which they never created. Air is essential to life and it is an equal right we have to its use. The same is true of land. We cannot live without it. All the means which we have of sustaining life depend on it, yet we allow some the privilege of charging us to live and work on the earth. Henry George puts this in very beautiful language: (I quote)

"This is the subtle alchemy that in ways they do not realize is extracting from the masses in every civilized country the fruits of their weary toil; that is instituting a harder and more hopeless slavery in place of that which has been destroyed; that is bringing political despotism

out of political freedom and must soon transmute democratic institutions into anarchy."

You cannot charge men for the right to work on the earth and not take in payment part of what they produce. The Single Tax would correct this wrong.

MISS KING. What you have just said and read is wonderfully interesting. Now we live in a scientific age and I have been wondering if the Single Tax has a really scientific basis or is it just a semi-socialistic, semi-communistic proposal which rests on emotion rather than facts?

COL. RULE. I am glad that you brought that question up. Some of the abuse which this theory has suffered came from those whose only reaction to something which will not benefit them, or which they do not understand, is to cry SOCIALISM—COMMUNISM—UNCONSTITUTIONAL! No, the Single Tax is not communistic nor is it socialistic. It does not propose to destroy private property in land. It merely proposes that the values in land which are social, that is those which God put in there for all, or which society has produced in land, should be public and not private property. Here is what Henry George said: (I quote)

"I do not propose either to purchase or to confiscate private property in land. The first would be unjust; the second needless. Let the individuals who now hold it still retain, if they want to, possession of what they are pleased to call their land. Let them continue to call it their land. Let them buy and sell and bequeath and devise it. We may safely leave them the shell if we take the kernel. It is not necessary to confiscate land; it is only necessary to confiscate rent." This merely means that land holders can have all the interest and wages they can produce from a piece of land. The economic rent, which is the gift of God made valuable by government, shall belong to all. We can easily appropriate this rent for public purposes by taxation of land values. No land has any value which has in it no natural resources, or no site value in relation to population and government. These values are the social values of land and they belong to all the people in equal right. The only way that they can be given to all the people in equal right is to make them pay for the service of government, and then to stop the injustice of taxing wages and industry which results in a tax on the food baskets of the consumer.

MISS KING. Now tell me, Col. Rule, if we were to adopt this theory which seems simple, sound, equitable and just, would we need other scientific taxes to maintain our governments?

COL. RULE. No one can answer that question with certainty. I must make the answer which Mother used to make to me when I wanted something: it all depends. No one can foretell or foresee the cost of government in any given period. We elected a party once which was pledged to reduce the cost of Federal Government by

twenty-five per cent, but as Mr. "Genial" Jim Farley says, the circumstances changed, and instead of a reduction there has been spent in three years as much as was expended in over one hundred years previously. It is "some" pump which we have had to prime, you see. But in spite of this I feel that this proposal would be sufficient. That is hardly the real question, however, because this rent fund clearly belongs in the public treasury for the equal enjoyment of all and it does not belong in private coffers for the support of an idle few. If, after we took all the publicly created values for public services we still needed more revenue, we could have a marriage and make the Single Tax a double tax. I don't think that it would be necessary.*

MISS KING. Can you tell us what the present system of taxation which Single Taxers would abolish really costs us that it should not cost?

COL. RULE. I cannot do this exactly, nor can anyone else, but it is fairly reasonably estimated. Hidden in our market baskets, restricting our purchases, lowering our purchasing power, creating our unemployment problem, rotting our slums and inspiring much of our crime is a hidden load of millions. But Mr. Cullman tells this story simply in his book, "Twenty Million Dollars Every Day." Free copies will be sent those who write me care of WCFL asking for it.

*Of course it would not be necessary. Nor should it be done. To "double" the Single Tax would be to tax labor values, to which we are opposed. There will be ample revenue for public purposes when government is economically administered. Besides, the abolition of all taxes on improvements would increase economic rent as a totality, thus placing at our disposal a larger share of community-produced land value.—Editor LAND AND FREEDOM.

Always the Same Silly Child

"TAKE it," said Nature, the great Mother Nurse, to the man crying like a baby. "It will do you good."

"But it is so bitter," whined the Man.

"Truth is always bitter," said the Great Nurse.

"I won't take it," said the Man, and went out and swallowed so many sugared lies that he sickened and died.

Then the Great Nurse gathered his head tenderly into her lap and smoothed the hair back from the forehead of the dead Man.

"Always the same silly child," she said.

JOSEPH DANA MILLER.

THAT he who produces should have, that he who saves should enjoy, is consistent with human reason and with the natural order. But existing inequalities of wealth cannot be justified on this ground.

SOCIAL PROBLEMS.