

could only reduce the laboring class to universal pauperism.

Thus it is, that to make either the abolition of protection or any other reform beneficial to the working-class we must abolish the inequality of legal rights to land, and restore to all their natural and equal rights in the common heritage.

How can this be done?

Consider for a moment precisely what it is that needs to be done, for it is here that confusion sometimes arises. To secure to each of the people of a country his equal right to the land of that country does not mean to secure to each an equal piece of land. Save in an extremely primitive society, where population was sparse, the division of labor had made little progress, and family groups lived and worked in common, a division of land into anything like equal pieces would indeed be impracticable. In a state of society such as exists in civilized countries to-day, it would be extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible, to make an equal division of land. Nor would one such division suffice. With the first division the difficulty would only begin. Where population is increasing and its centres are constantly changing; where different vocations make different uses of land, and require different qualities and amounts of it; where improvements and discoveries and inventions are constantly bringing out new uses, and changing relative values, a division that should be equal to-day would soon become very unequal, and to maintain equality a re-division every year would be necessary.

But to make a re-division every year, or to treat land as a common, where no one could claim the exclusive use of any particular piece, would only be practicable where men lived in movable tents and made no permanent improvements, and would effectually prevent any advance beyond such a state. No one would sow a crop or build a house, or open a mine, or plant an orchard, or cut a drain, so long as anyone else could come in and turn him out of the land in which or on which such improvements must be fixed. Thus it is absolutely necessary to the proper use and improvement of land that society should secure to the user and improver safe possession.

This point is constantly raised by those who resent any questioning of our present treatment of land. They seek to begot the issue by persistently treating every proposition to secure equal rights to land as though it were a proposition to secure an equal division of land, and attempt to defend private property in land by setting forth the necessity of securing safe possession to the improver.

But the two things are essentially different.

In the first place equal rights to land could *not* be secured by the equal division of land, and in the second place it is *not* necessary to make land the private property of individuals in order to secure to improvers that safe possession of their improvements that is needed to induce men to make improvements. On the contrary, private property in land, as we may see in any country where it exists, enables mere dogs-in-the-manger to levy blackmail upon improvers. It enables the mere owner of land to compel the improver to pay him for the privilege of making improvements, and in many cases it enables him to confiscate the improvements.

Here are two simple principles, both of which are self-evident:

I.—That all men have equal rights to the use and enjoyment of the elements provided by nature.

II.—That each man has an exclusive right to the use and enjoyment of what is produced by his own labor.

There is no conflict between these principles. On the contrary they are correlative. To fully secure the individual right of property in the produce of labor we *must* treat the elements of nature as common property. If any one could claim the sunlight as his property, and could compel me to pay him for the agency of the sun in the growth of crops I had planted, it would necessarily lessen my right of property in the produce of my labor. And conversely, where every one is secured the full right of property in the produce of his labor, no one can have any right of property in what is not the produce of labor.

No matter how complex the industrial organization, nor how highly developed the civilization, there is no real difficulty in carrying out these principles. All we have to do is to treat the land as the joint property of the whole people, just as a railway is treated as the joint property of many shareholders, or as a ship is treated as the joint property of several owners.

In other words, we can leave land now being used in the secure possession of those using it, and leave land now unused to be taken possession of by those who wish to make use of it, on condition that those who thus hold land shall pay to the community a fair rent for the exclusive privilege they enjoy—that is to say, a rent based on the value of the privilege the individual receives from

the community in being accorded the exclusive use of this much of the common property, and which should have no reference to any improvement he had made in or on it, or to any profit due to the use of his labor and capital. In this way all would be placed upon an equality in regard to the use and enjoyment of those natural elements which are clearly the common heritage, and that value which attaches to land, not because of what the individual user does, but because of the growth of the community, would accrue to the community, and could be used for purposes of common benefit.

But to make land virtually the common property of the whole people, and to appropriate ground rent for public use, there is a much simpler and easier way than that of formally assuming the ownership of land and proceeding to rent it out in lots—a way that involves no shock, that will conform to present customs, and that instead of requiring a great increase of governmental machinery, will permit of a great simplification of governmental machinery.

In every well-developed community large sums are needed for common purposes, and the sums thus needed increase with social growth, not merely in amount, but proportionately, since social progress tends steadily to devolve on the community as a whole functions which in a ruder stage are discharged by individuals. Now, while people are not used to paying rent to government, they are used to paying taxes to government. Some of these taxes are levied upon personal or movable property; some upon occupations or businesses or persons (as in the case of income taxes, which are in reality taxes on persons according to income); some upon the transportation or exchange of commodities, in which last category fall the taxes imposed by tariffs; and some, in the United States at least, on real estate—that is to say, on the value of land and of the improvements upon it, taken together.

That part of the tax on real estate which is assessed on the value of land irrespective of improvements is, in its nature, not a tax, but a rent—a taking for the common use of the community of a part of the income that properly belongs to the community by reason of the equal right of all to the use of land.

Now it is evident that, in order to take for the use of the community the whole income arising from land, just as effectually as it could be taken by formally appropriating and letting out the land, it is only necessary to abolish, one after another, all other taxes now levied, and to increase the tax on land values till it reaches, as near as may be, the full annual value of the land.

Whenever this point of theoretical perfection is reached, the selling value of land will entirely disappear, and the charge made to the individual by the community for the use of the common property will become in form what it is in fact—a rent. But until that point is reached, this rent may be collected by the simple increase of a tax already levied in all our states, assessed (as direct taxes are now assessed) upon the selling value of land irrespective of improvements—a value that can be ascertained more easily and more accurately than any other value.

For a full exposition of the effects of this change in the method of raising public revenues, I must refer the reader to the works in which I have treated this branch of the subject at greater length than is here possible. Briefly, they would be threefold:

In the first place, all taxes that now fall upon the exertion of labor or use of capital would be abolished. No one would be taxed for building a house or improving a farm or opening a mine, for bringing things in from foreign countries, or from adding in any way to the stock of things that satisfy human wants and constitute national wealth. Every one would be free to make and save wealth; to buy, sell, give or exchange, without let or hindrance, any article of human production the use of which did not involve any public injury. All those taxes which increase prices as things pass from hand to hand, falling finally upon the consumer, would disappear. Buildings or other fixed improvements would be as secure as now, and could be bought and sold, as now, subject to the tax or ground rent due to the community for the ground on which they stood. Houses and the ground they stand on, or other improvements and the land they are made on, would also be rented as now. But the amount the tenant would have to pay would be less than now, since the taxes now levied on buildings or improvements fall ultimately (save in decaying communities) on the user, and the tenant would therefore get the benefit of their abolition. And in this reduced rent the tenant would pay all those taxes that he now has to pay in addition to his rent—any remainder of what he paid on account of the ground going not to increase the wealth of a landlord but to add to a fund in which the tenant himself would be an equal sharer.

In the second place, a large and constantly increasing