

# Single Tax on Land Not a Panacea for Our Tax Ills

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County Assessor

At first glance the single tax on land only appears to be a panacea for one of the primary defects of our present system of property taxation — that the tax does not measure ability to pay.

The idea of raising our tax revenues by taxing away the added value accruing yearly to the landowner through the development of the society itself, rather than taxing the

value of the property owner himself has added to his property through his own efforts, is immense, appealing.

When we read "success" stories of fortunes having been made by buying land for almost nothing and holding it for sale later at huge profits, it's only human nature to feel a tinge of resentment. After all, the owner did nothing to earn a profit — he just waited for the value to rise to the point at

which he wanted to sell.

**THIS IS WHAT** economists call "unearned increment." The single-taxers call it "speculative profits."

It is true that many people have grown rich on this unearned increment—but is this the evil the single-taxers make it sound? The profit motive is the heart of our free enterprise system, and if a man chooses to invest in property rather than a busi-

ness, can we say this is bad? It would be bad, in terms of benefit to the community and equity to all taxpayers, if vacant land were forever assessed at its initial cost and never reassessed as its market value grew over the years until the big profit sale had been made. This can happen and it has happened.

But if the Assessor is doing the proper kind of job, the assessed value on the land has kept pace with the

rising market values around it. The owners who wished to hold onto the land with the expectation of future profits would also be paying higher taxes as the value increased.

**IN LOS ANGELES** County, for example, we make a determined effort to keep our assessments abreast of rising market values, on vacant land as well as developed property.

Along these same lines, the

single-tax advocates ignore the practical problem of how to separate the value of the improvements from the value of the land in a built-up area. Those communities which have gone all the way, or partially (by setting higher tax rates on land than on buildings), to the single tax have yet to come up with a satisfactory answer.

Excluding appraisals for assessment purposes, all appraisals have always consid-

ered the value of a piece of property as a whole — land, buildings, location, etc. Since I took office, we now make a total property market value appraisal first — and only afterward, assign, as we must by law, separate values to the land and improvements. If there are vacant parcels in an area, we can gauge market value of the land by selling prices of the vacant parcels when they sell.

**BUT THIS** assignment of separate values in a completely built-up area would have to be almost totally arbitrary and therefore, highly inequitable. It would also put

a complacent Assessor in a position to increase tax revenues by increasing assessments since there would be no comparative land sales against which a property owner could judge the fairness of his land assessment.

Advocates of the single tax also claim that it would lower taxes for the homeowner, though I have yet to see any convincing evidence that this has been the case where it has been tried. Our studies, using Los Angeles County as an example, and assuming that we would still be attempting to appraise and assess at market value, show

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Wheaties . . . . . 18-Oz.	47c	51c	Dole Pineapple Juice . . . . . 46-Oz.	33c	37c	Nucon Margarine . . . . .	1.00	1.00
Cheerios . . . . . 10 1/2-Oz.	36c	39c	Sunsweet Prune Juice . . . . . Qt.	43c	49c	Foremost or Brentwood Ice Cream, 1/2-Gal.	1.00	1.00
Kellogg's Corn Flakes . . . . . 18-Oz.	39c	45c	Del Monte Peas . . . . . 303	23c	25c	Minute Maid Frozen Orange Juice . . . . . 6	1.00	1.00
Kellogg's Rice Krispies . . . . . 13-Oz.	45c	49c	Niblets Whole Kernel Corn . . . . . 12-Oz.	19c	23c	Banquet & Morton Dinners . . . . . 11	1.00	1.00
Kellogg's Special K . . . . . 10 1/2-Oz.	45c	51c	Tenderloin . . . . . 48's	62c	69c	Nelez Ketchup . . . . . 16	1.00	1.00
Kellogg's Sugar Frosted Flakes . . . . . 15-Oz.	45c	49c	Log Cabin Syrup . . . . . 24-Oz.	63c	69c	Shasta Beverages . . . . . 13	1.00	1.00
Quick Oatmeal . . . . . 42-Oz.	48c	53c	Wesson Oil . . . . . 24-Oz.	39c	41c	Von Ompf or Hunts Pork & Beans . . . . .	1.00	1.00
Gold Meal or Pillsbury Flour . . . . . 5-Lb.	59c	63c	Gaines Meal . . . . . 2-Lb.	37c	41c	D.M. Hill Pickles . . . . . 22	1.00	1.00
Best Foods Mayonnaise . . . . . Qt.	59c	62c	Purina . . . . . 5-Lb. Bag	77c	83c	Aunt Jemima Pancake Mix . . . . . 2	1.00	1.00
Miracle Whip Salad Dressing . . . . . Qt.	55c	61c	Purina Dog Chow or Gravy Train . . . . . 10-Lb.	\$1.33	\$1.47	Bisquick Biscuit Mix . . . . . 40	1.00	1.00
LM 1/2 Chunk Chix O Sea or Starkist Tuna . . . . .	29c	33c	NBC Med. Milk Bone . . . . . 26-Oz.	39c	45c	Betty Crocker & Duncan Home is Cake Mix . . . . .	1.00	1.00
Glorietta Tomato Juice . . . . . 46-Oz.	3/89c	31c	Speak Dog Food . . . . . 36-Oz.	89c	93c	Smuckers Strawberry Preserv. . . . . 12	1.00	1.00

BEECH-NUT BABY FOOD STRAINED 4 1/2-OZ. JAR . . . . . 9c	LOMA LINDA RUSKET FLAKES 10-OUNCE PACKAGE . . . . . 29c	'ALL' FLUFFY DETERGENT 3-POUND PACKAGE . . . . . 75c	LIFEBUOY SOAP REGULAR SIZE BARS . . . . . 3 for 39c	PRaise SOAP REGULAR SIZE BARS . . . . . 2 for 27c
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