

Oregon Labor Press Cartoon - Single Tax

By Oregon Labor Press

This editorial cartoon ran in the July 1, 1916, edition of the *Oregon Labor Press*. It encouraged voters to support the Peoples Land and Loan Measure in an upcoming state election. Supporters of the measure argued that it would abolish poverty by putting idle land into production and would provide independent workers with the resources to produce goods from that land. Supporters of the measure included the Portland Central Labor Council, the Oregon State Federation of Labor, and William S. U'Ren.

The official title of the ballot measure was the Full Rental Value Land Tax and Homemakers' Loan Fund Amendment. It was the last in a series of three unsuccessful measures that would have enacted some version of a "single tax." Single-tax advocates targeted the practices of monopoly and land speculation, which they believed kept working people from having the opportunity to develop resources (mainly land) and enjoy the fruits of their labors. Under a single tax, landholders would be taxed equally, whether or not the land they own is in productive use, thereby forcing landholders to either make their land productive or hand it back over to the state. Supporters maintained that making land productive would create jobs and putting land back into the public's use could spread resources. Opponents argued that the legislation would remove property from its rightful owners and give it to those who did not want to work.

Although the measures were unsuccessful in Oregon, their existence on the ballot prompted discussion about the proper distribution of wealth in a democratic society. Californian Henry George first proposed the single tax as a solution to widespread poverty with his 1882 publication, *Progress and Poverty*. But George was not the first to argue that that wealth was created by work rather than ownership. John Locke had made similar arguments in the seventeenth century in his book *Second Treatise on Government*, and many Euro-American settlers in the West were inspired by the Jeffersonian ideal of a society based on egalitarian land ownership.

The Oregon Labor Press began publication in 1900 as the *Portland Labor Press*. It has continually been published since then, today under the name *Northwest Labor Press*.

Further Reading: Lawrence M. Lipin, "'Cast Aside the Automobile Enthusiast': Class Conflict, Tax Policy, and the Preservation of Nature in Progressive-Era Oregon," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 107:2 (Summer 2006): 166-195 Written by Eliza Canty-Jones, © Oregon Historical Society, 2007.

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