GEORGE MILLER (from page 7)

to do so), ... Rent exists for the landlord ... whether or not the land is occupied by owner or tenant, the proof being that he can sell it. " – p. 66.

Few academic economists see that point at all, let alone so clearly and cogently. Indeed, many who consider themselves to be Georgists retreat into defensive mode when challenged with the "poor widow" argument – as the late Bob Tideman put it, the claim that "the poor people own all the land".

How is it that Dr. Miller, with no studies in economics, but his brain cells crammed with advanced training in epidemiology, can see basic and even subtle economics so clearly in, as it were, his spare time? It bolsters the case, expounded by many of us recently, that economics, as taught in most colleges today, is more a barrier than an aid to clear thinking. This work is truly interdisciplinary, especially among economics, history, and Dr. Miller's profession, human health.

A fascinating section is on eugenics, and how it took on the role of Malthusianism after the latter seemed dispelled by the industrial revolution, the development of new lands, chemical wonders like the Haber-Bosch process for fixing nitrogen, and genetic advances like those of Luther Burbank in the west and G.W. Carver in the southeast. Eugenics (ignoring Carver's African ancestry) was highly fashionable and respectable, even liberal, from the time of Charles Darwin and Francis Galton clear until Adolf Hitler reduced it to shame. The pro-Nazi movement among elements of the British and French aristocracies before W.W. II fused easily with Teutonism in Germany in the guise of eugenics. Would that Dr. Miller were with us today to help put down modern revivals of eugenics as expressed by Charles Murray of The American Enterprise Institute and Richard Herrnstein of Harvard (*The Bell Curve*) and Greg Clark of U.C. Davis (*A Farewell to Alms).*

A quick tour through Miller's chapters conveys his great breadth. One and Two are on the close causal relationship of poverty as cause with sickness and mortality as effects. He shows causation by common-sense in plain prose, free of "black box" techniques. Three is basic law of rent. Four is on unemployment, showing that job insecurity is a cause of ill health. Five is on palliatives of the welfare state, and their failure. Six is on housing, and how squalid housing impairs health and longevity. Seven is on land-value taxation as a remedy. Eight, Nine and Ten are on feudal tax history as a precedent for modern taxation of land values. Eleven and Twelve are on the failures of England's token remedies for unemployment. Thirteen and Fourteen are on the history of the movement for land-value taxation in England, 1880 to date.

The bare summary above cannot do justice to the richness of the overall MS. It is a kind of cultural treasure that could lead one to a lifetime of study - and it will also stimulate action, which is Miller's objective.

The printed volume is only about half of Miller's original MS – Bristol's Policy Press cut it down to lower the price. That was wise at the time, but more serious scholars will want access to the unprinted parts, the life work of a genius of the social sciences, still sequestered. With today's technology it would be economical to post them on line. Let us hope that Miller's heirs and assigns do so, and soon.

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DETROIT (from page 3)

Our cities and towns impose downward pressures on themselves because their systems of taxation tend to penalize job-creation and capital goods creation by heavy taxation of wages, business profits and property improvements. And, at the same time, they reward destructive land speculation by very low effective rates of taxation on community-created land values.

Every parcel of land in a community has some potential annual rental value, this value a function of locational advantage or disadvantage. Location rental values of land parcels are, naturally, highest in downtown business districts. Here is also where land prices are the highest in the community. The reason land prices are high is because the effective rate of annual taxation is so low. Land economists have been writing about this phenomena for a century, urging communities to impose a 100 percent annual tax on land rental values (exempting property improvement values from the tax base altogether). A 100 percent tax on land rental values means there is no annual income (imputed or actual) to be capitalized into a selling price for land. Thus, land owners find it in their own interest to develop land to its highest, best use – or sell to someone who will. With no taxation of the property improvement, there is a built-in incentive to replace worn out buildings once depreciated; or, if the buildings have good alternative uses, to renovate them accordingly.

Detroit has an enormous amount of land to offer for development. Right now, there is no demand for the land for what we think of as urban uses. Remediated, much of the vacant land can be leased by the city at competitive bidding for agricultural use. Leasing city-owned land by competitive bidding equates to imposing a 100 percent tax on land rental values.

Another aspect of the problem is how property is assessed for tax purposes. Almost universally across the United States (with some rare exceptions) property assessments are terrible, rarely consistent as a percentage of current market values, and highly regressive (i.e., higher as a percentage of market value in distressed neighborhoods than in neighborhoods dominated by higher income households). Thus, "gentrification" and "land speculation" feed on one another.

Will Detroit allow land speculators to reign supreme as has been the case in almost every city in the United States?

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