

**THE EDWIN  
BURGESS LETTERS  
ON TAXATION**

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The Edwin Burgess Letters on Taxation by Edwin Burgess

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EDWIN BURGESS  
LETTERS  
ON TAXATION  
ALEX. PERNOD;



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EDWIN BURGESS

## Introduction

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Mr. Edwin Burgess author of these letters on taxation (first published in the Racine Advocate of 1859-60,) was born in London, England, in 1807 and died in Racine, Wis., in 1869.

He received an ordinary common school education and served an apprenticeship to the tailors trade; a man of the average middle class of the early part of the 19th century; a competent craftsman and evidently a man of some ambition, as he emigrated to the United States in the middle 40s, locating in Racine, Wis., and establishing himself in a fairly successful business. So that by the time of the breaking out of the Civil War he was in possession of a modest competence and being in failing health he retired from business, but not from a keen interest in the welfare of his fellowmen.

In personal appearance he was one of the men you would hardly pass on the street without taking a second look at him (as his portrait which we secured after a long search among his old friends and neighbors will fully show.) We who were young at that time remember him as a man of liberal ideas in both politics and religion but most kindly, moderate and thoughtful in all things, but in the overshadowing presence of the anti-slavery campaign and the impending Civil War, these letters of his were passed over as the irrelevant dreams of a crank and at the time excited but little note or comment.

Yet, here was a man who probably never read the "Wealth of Nations" or the writings of any of the great political economists, out of a heart overflowing with sympathy for his fellowmen and especially for the masses of his fellow countrymen and a wonderful keenness of intellect evolved practically the whole theory of the Single tax as set forth and elaborated 20 years later by Henry George.

The verses accompanying the letters reveal a heart full of human sympathy, while the letters show an originality and depth of thought and clearness of statement which place him among the foremost thinkers of the age. In fact a man of far more logical acumen and breadth of view than many of the men who figure largely on the rolls of fame.

In commenting on these letters, Mr. F. M. King, editor of the *Liberator* (single tax organ of New Zealand, to whose kindness and courtesy we are indebted for the copies from which this is printed,) who republished them in 1908, says: "The marvel of it is, that single-handed and in spite of chronic sickness, he should have worked out the true solution of the social problem 20 years before Henry George's work was heard of.

"As a working man, speaking to working men, these letters and poems are a legacy of which we should all be proud."

He made a visit to England in 1864, taking with him an edition of these letters and distributing several hundred on Broadway, N. Y., and the balance in the streets of London.

After his death his wife returned to England and in accordance with his wish had an edition printed for free distribution, one of which was found in Mr. Chas. Brailaugh's collection of miscellaneous pamphlets now in the British museum.

The fact that the ideas he advanced fifty years ago are now commanding the attention of the whole civilized world and shaping very largely the destinies of Great Britain and her colonies, would seem to be a sufficient reason for the re-issue of these remarkable letters and it seemed unfair that the work and memory of such a man should be allowed to perish in the place of its birth.

In view of all which the reprint is put forth by his old time friends and admirers.

HYLAND RAYMOND,  
WM. S. BUFFHAM.



# The Edwin Burgess Letters on Taxation

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## Land Versus Labour Tax.

Why tax we the produce of any one's toil  
While it raises the price of the land,  
And limits the sale, by enhancing the price  
Of the food which the poor must demand?  
It raises the price of the product of land,  
And lowers the wages of toil,  
So the workers have little their wants to supply,  
And nothing to purchase the soil.

With little to buy, they have little demand  
For the produce of any one's toil;  
So the workers are idle, as well as the land,  
While weeds grow on much of the soil.  
Men perish, tho' labour and land would afford  
What would keep them in comfort and joy,  
While the blessings of health and the comfort of wealth  
Would follow their steady employ.

No taxes on aught that our labour can make,  
For these would diminish free toil;  
But so much per acre all over the land,  
So that no one should hoard up the soil,  
For the landlords have robbed us, for ages before,  
Taxed all but the land which they stole,  
Our food and our drink, our paper and ink,  
To enslave us in body and soul,

May we reap the reward we've endeavoured to sow,  
Of free land and the freedom of trade,  
That the taxes may henceforth be all on the land,  
And never on labour be laid.

EDWIN BURGESS, 1859-1860.  
Racine, Wisconsin, U. S. A.

## TAXATION CONSIDERED.

### LETTER I.

Being in the County Clerk's Room of the Court House, I saw a large pile of papers headed "Statement of Property," to be filled out and sworn to by every resident owner. "The number and value of horses and cattle, mules and asses, sheep, hogs, pleasure carriages of every description, watches, moneys and credits, merchant's stock, manufacturer's stock and other articles of personal property;" which is everything that one person could sue another for stealing.

Now, I could not help thinking somewhat on the cost as well as consequence of such a method of Taxing People for the support of Government.

1st. Taxing people for their personal property—on their oath, is a premium on perjury, because those who lie the most, pay the least taxes; and children born under such influences will be famous for lying—if there is any connection between cause and effect in the condition of parent and offspring.

2nd. The means of valuing or assessing are very expensive; thus increasing the cost of government, as well as the cost of corruption.

3rd. Taxing personal property prevents production, because the tax being added to the article for sale, increases its price in proportion to the means of buying. Hence, less is sold and less is made, and the makers are less employed; and having, consequently, less with which to buy, the makers of other things will be less employed also—till the surplus workers will become paupers, and suffer much misery in consequence; many will become hopeless, and reckless because hopeless. Some will be tempted to commit crime for the temporary alleviation of their misery, which, repeated, soon becomes a habit; we have then paupers and criminals to support, pauper houses and prisons to build, officers to hire to superintend both; Legislators to make laws for their government; thus the Tax on personal property, or the product of industry, increases the amount of paupers and criminals, while the cost of keeping paupers and criminals, officers and Legislators, increases the amount of Tax and the cost of government, of course.

A friend of mine intended to buy a piano, but the Tax decided him against it; fewer watches will be sold, because they are taxed. If any person puts up a new fence, or make any visible improvement, which employs the unemployed and prevents their continuance as paupers, and beautifies the city—they are taxed annually in proportion to the evil they prevent and the good they do.

4th. Taxing personal property is not only costly, corruptive, and pauper-making, and promotive of misery and crime, but inquisitorial, burdensome, and aggressive against our right to labour and enjoy the fruit of our toil unmolested; as long as we injure no one, we should be protected against aggression, instead of suffering aggression. Are we not now taxed for the aggression instead of the protection against it?

5th. Taxing people in proportion to their industry prevents industry; because when an industrious person labours twelve hours per day, successfully, he must pay twelve times as much taxes, because he has made twelve times as much property to be taxed, as if he had worked only one hour per day; and besides the limit of his means to pay the tax, whether in a watch, a piano, or a horse, no one likes to be taxed for the idleness of others, and he feels the injustice also, and improvements are thus prevented which would profitably employ the idle.

6th. Taxing personal property raises the price of land, and thus promotes its monopoly by the rich—because land being the source of our subsistence, which labour develops or increases, from which, and on which, all must live, and money instead of manhood being the qualification for owning land, it follows that in proportion as the taxes are on per-

sonal property, the land will be exempt, and it will be thus, comparatively cheap, or easy for the rich to monopolise; so that if all the taxes were on the land, it would sell for the lowest price, and would be most difficult to monopolise; but if all the taxes were on personal property, and none on the land, then the land would sell for the highest price, and labour would sell for the lowest price, because of the excessive competition of the landless and destitute workers, who by selling their labour for the smallest portion of its produce, would keep the land at the highest possible price; so, when you want land to be low, and wages high, put all the taxes on the land; but if you prefer labour to be low and land high, you have only to put all the taxes on personal property. All articles of productive industry cost the keeping of the maker and contriver, but the land costs nothing for either. It is the natural inheritance of all, for all time; and all should be protected in their possession, and those who own all the land should certainly pay all the Taxes for keeping them in possession and their neighbours out of it.

EDWIN BURGESS, 1859-1860.

#### WAGES SLAVERY.

Must not our southern lords be fools  
To buy their slaves, when they're so plenty,  
When stealing land by laws and rules,  
And keeping poor folks' stomachs empty,  
Would give them wages slaves for naught,  
Who'd beg to have their labour bought;  
And women, too, breathe soft the word,  
Who'd sell their bodies for their board?

Our wages slaves ne'er run away,  
The fear of starving makes them stay;  
Though they must earn the daily bread  
For others' mouths beside their own,  
Who on the best are ever fed,  
Aping the monarch on his throne;  
Yet hirelings bowed with want and care  
Are glad the coarsest food to share.

The keep of chattels is a bore,  
When sick or they can work or more;  
Without the lash to drive the work,  
Chattels are very apt to shirk;  
But the poor landless wages slave,  
Must clothing, food, and shelter crave;  
For these he works with willing hand  
For any one by sea or land.

Then grasp the land, the source of wealth,  
Of life, of energy, and health;  
And only let the workers toil,  
While you by law can reap the spoil.  
What man or woman e'er so brave,  
Will want not make a wages slave,  
A slave in body and in mind,  
To any tyrant of their kind?

EDWIN BURGESS, 1859-1860.