

# THE SINGLE TAX REVIEW

A Record of the Progress of Single Tax and Tax Reform  
Throughout the World.

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## WHAT SHALL WE DO TO BE SAVED?

(For the Review.)

By OLIVER R. TROWBRIDGE.\*

Within the last few months there has been considerable discussion among Single Taxers as to the present status of the movement. All admit that outwardly there has been a falling off of the old time spirit of the propaganda. Some of those who are closely identified with the movement maintain, however, that the change is rather in form than in substance. They think that on the whole the movement is progressive, and that to-day more persons than ever before are identified with this reform, or at least are familiar with its doctrines. For many years I have been a student, not only of Single Tax doctrines, but of the Single Tax movement itself; and much as I dislike to say it, I am constrained to agree with the opinion expressed by Mr. Ernest Crosby in the last REVIEW that Tolstoy is very nearly right in saying that the teachings of Henry George have fallen into great neglect. I would not express it in just this way (nor would Mr. Crosby, I think), but would say rather that the teachings of Mr. George have nowhere and at no time received that measure of acceptance to which they are so clearly entitled; and that relatively the last few years have marked a decline rather than an advance. As suggested by Mr. Crosby, we have only to compare for a moment the Single Tax progress with that of socialism to see what is meant by Tolstoy.

In this connection I wish to call attention to the fact, as furnishing the keynote of this article, that the present Single Tax propaganda is confined almost entirely to individualistic lines; that its chief adherents (myself included, if I may claim the honor,) have come to it from the individualistic school, and that in the United States its converts nearly all come from one of the great political parties. In my opinion these facts disclose the weakness, not of the essential Single Tax doctrines, but of the Single Tax movement. To my mind these doctrines are worthy of universal acceptance upon their merits. If they are truly to prevail, they must ultimately receive an acceptance that is well-nigh universal. This they can not do unless they are propagated upon broad and liberal lines.

For eight years prior to 1896 I resided and practiced my profession (law) in the city of Chicago. It was during these years that the old Chicago Single Tax Club was in its prime and met with largest growth. In connection with its work and my own efforts to spread the doctrines of Mr. George, I became impressed with certain matters which gradually changed my point of view as to propaganda methods. In the hope that my experiences and the conclusions

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based thereon may be of benefit to other workers and to the movement as a whole, I shall outline them as well as I can within the limits of this article.

#### MY OWN EXPERIENCE.

First, in connection with my own work. I had read *Progress and Poverty* critically five times and always with pleasure. To me it was easy reading. I regarded it not only as easily the greatest book of the nineteenth century, but also as the greatest book that had ever come from the hand and pen of one man. But I met the experience of all those who have urged others to read *Progress and Poverty*. Many read it, but all these did not accept its teachings. Some feared to accept its conclusions because of the very charm of its literary style; others declared they could get nothing out of it; still others that its doctrines are unjust, and not a few failed or refused to read more than a part of the book because it presented too long an argument. Some readers I tried to rescue with Mr. George's Open Letter to the Pope On the Condition of Labor, as I regarded this as the classic of economic ethics. This book appealed to some to whom the more complete masterpiece did not, and this suggested to me that the literature, together with the spirit and method of the movement must be enlarged until they shall present the essential doctrines in ways that appeal to persons of all the more common bents of mind.

At that time my work, like that of the Club, was along individualistic lines. I felt, however, that if the Single Tax doctrines were presented differently, we might reach many who were more or less inclined toward socialism. I began to see that the individualistic arguments presented but one side, and this the more remote, though none the less true, side of the Single Tax doctrine. For the truth is that it is only the end, the final goal of the Single Tax movement that is distinctively a matter of individualism. The immediate means, the working plan of the movement is distinctively socialistic. This must necessarily be true of the working plan of a movement whose immediate object is to make the land common property and whose ultimate object is to attain economic freedom for the individual by this means. It seems to me that many Single Taxers entirely ignore the force of what Mr. George must have regarded as one of the most significant passages in *Progress and Poverty* since he gave it a separate paragraph in italics in a chapter of exceptional brevity: *We must make land common property.*

This statement of the immediate step to be taken is followed by an elaboration by Mr. George of the working plan of the movement by means of which common property in land is to be attained by the appropriation by the State of ground rents under the forms of taxation for the purposes of revenue. There is nothing individualistic about this working plan, although it makes true individualism for the first time possible. The working plan itself cannot in any way be translated into an individualistic formula; but it lends itself readily to the formula of limited socialism: *We must socialize the land by socializing all ground values*; or, we can make the Single Tax working plan include the complementary step of public ownership and operation of all public utilities under this formula: *We must socialize all natural opportunities by socializing all ground values and franchise values.* Result: The complete individualization of all other forms of property and all other business activities.

#### SINGLE TAX IS SOCIALISM LIMITED.

From a consideration of these matters I concluded that the first two steps of our reform (the public appropriation of ground rent and the public owner-

ship and operation of public utilities) are socialistic, and that instead of concealing or denying this fact, we should avow it openly and at all times. As a corollary to this it follows, of course, that when we come in contact with people who are already tinctured with socialism (and many such people there are in all walks of life), we should neither dismiss them as mollusks who are incapable of thought, nor undertake to club the socialism out of them in order to club some individualism into them. By judicious treatment they may often be made into thorough-going Single-Taxers.

Consider for a moment: A friend asks you about the Single Tax, and his questions indicate that he has associated it in his mind with socialism. You assure him that nothing could be farther from the truth—that Single-Taxers are strict individualists. “What, then,” he asks, “do they propose?” You explain that the first great step to be taken is the appropriation by the community of ground rent in taxation and its expenditure for the common good. Suppose he then says: “Well, now, if I understand you, you propose to socialize ground rents instead of socializing the land itself.” Will you then do violence to his sense of logic (to say nothing of your own) by assuring him that what you have proposed is individualism, simply because you can demonstrate to him beyond question that it will finally result in the economic freedom of the individual by securing and maintaining equality of opportunity? Do you not see that the steps by which you may mount to a plateau are very different from the plateau itself?

And then as to the second step—you are asked about that. You explain that Single-Taxers also favor public ownership of public utilities. “Then,” says your inquirer, “if I understand you now, you are in favor of socializing all public utilities.” Can you consistently deny this? If not, will not your friend say, “Where, then, is your individualism? I thought you said you were not a socialist!” The fact is that at this point, for the first time, you are in a position to disclose your individualism. Individualism is not the beginning, it is not the working plan of your philosophy. It is the end, the final goal, the plateau to which your socialistic steps have led. Is it not true?

My good friend Mr. John Z. White is perhaps the champion *par excellence* of the individualistic school (and this school has about all the pupils at present) among Single-Taxers. Yet in the old days of knock-down-and-drag-out argument he was wont to say that he did not seriously object to socialism, provided it had a safety valve; that is, provided it furnished equality of opportunity to all. But for socialism without a safety valve, or with a safety valve weighted down with governmental monopoly or bureaucracy he had no use. Nor have I.

Could a happier expression be found for the Single Tax movement in its purity and its fullness than this: The Single Tax is socialism—with a safety valve! Individualism furnishes the safety valve; but the safety valve is not the whole engine—neither is it the motive power. It furnishes a check, a limitation upon the steam, not the steam itself. And a safety valve weighted down, overworking its function, is dangerous. So it seems to me that in our movement the element of individualism is given too much weight; that it is overworking its function and so interferes unnecessarily with the efficiency of the machinery.

While considering the above matters I had also in mind the fact that, aside from those socialistically inclined, the members of one of the great political parties are practically unaffected by our propaganda. This is greatly to be regretted, and unless a radical change can be effected in this regard, the growth of the movement must be very slow. I became impressed also with the fact that the more modern, or so-called Austrian theory of value, when fully worked out, could be made the basis of a scientific treatment of Single Tax principles.

#### AN EXPERIMENT.

In 1896 I removed to Bloomington, a city of 25,000 inhabitants, located in

the midst of the rich farming lands of central Illinois. Here my environment was greatly changed. There was no Single Tax sentiment discernable, although Mr. E. H. Bailey, now of the *Johnstown Democrat*, had sown some good seed (in pretty thorny places, however,) some years before. Few people knew anything of the doctrine and the most of them seemed to care not at all. The values of farm land began to increase rapidly soon after this time and practically all these lands have since doubled in value. The prevailing sentiment was conservative to a degree, except that socialism was beginning to make some headway, largely among railway-shop employees. The county was strongly republican; so much so that the sun could scarcely rise on a democrat before eleven o'clock; and on election day the sun set on democratic hopes shortly after dinner. It is somewhat different now, but in such an economic atmosphere I completed the investigations begun in democratic Chicago. By 1902 I had arrived at the principal conclusions published in *Bisocialism* a year later.

Before publishing these conclusions I desired to test their effectiveness with reference to people of different minds and predilections, and an opportunity to do this occurred in 1902-3. I was asked by a young attorney to discuss economic matters from my points of view with himself and a few friends, and I consented to do this on condition that those who attended the discussions should be taken equally from the republican and democratic parties and that party politics should be completely barred. Weekly meetings were begun, the first evening with six young attorneys. The attendance grew rapidly, however, until the number reached twenty-four—evenly divided politically. The additional members or attendants (there was no organization whatever) included the editor and the business manager of a leading partisan daily paper, the manager having represented the district in the State legislature; merchants; retail salesmen; traveling men; a teacher; more lawyers (eleven in all), and a real estate speculator. At one of the early meetings the proprietor of a jewelry store who had been a republican until converted to socialism by Eugene V. Debs asked leave to attend and was given welcome.

At these meetings I took the same position regarding the socialistic and individualistic phases of the Single Tax doctrine outlined above and practically as given more in detail in *Bisocialism*. I also discussed the new theory of value, the entire land question, the tariff, the money question, the wages question, labor unions, monopolies and franchises, compensation to present owners, and all other questions afterward included in my book, and in the same manner. These meetings began October 1; the next summer I suggested a vacation for July and August at least, but the members preferred to continue the meetings despite the season. Accordingly we met each week, practically, for twenty months. It was not a rare thing for a member to forego the pleasures of some social event in order to attend one of these meetings.

#### THE RESULT.

I shall not attempt to give results in detail except in one instance. Suffice it to say that they were highly satisfactory to me in every way. Of two things I may speak especially: I am sure that this method of presenting the Single Tax working plan as a phase of socialism is easily apprehended, and does not, in the most conservative environment, tend to keep either republicans or democrats from accepting the doctrine fully; and I have never been able to see that it made a particle of difference whether a member had been a republican or a democrat; or scarcely that it made any difference whether he had been or was even then actively engaged in the work of one of the old parties. Within our first year a local campaign along party lines came on. Some of our young



lawyers took active parts on their respective sides but they absorbed the Single Tax doctrine just the same and apparently equally well. One of these came to me to explain his absence from one of our meetings. He said he was booked by his party for a speech a few evenings later, and that he had absorbed so much bisocialism (Single Tax + public ownership) that he was afraid he might mix things in his campaign speech; so he had stayed away from our meeting in order to attend one of his party in order to get his bearings and the proper inspiration for his speech later on. This was said not merely in jest, but seriously. He was a republican, too.

But what of our socialist member? Well, he was treated just like the rest; no especial effort was made either to please or to offend him. Neither sops nor bricks were thrown at him, and he attended regularly. At first he defended socialism; then he conceded that if we are to have socialism, the Single Tax is the way to get it. He talked in this way at the meetings of his socialist local, also. Finally, the leader of the local, after expostulating with him in vain, preferred charges of economic heresy against him, and moved his expulsion. He was not expelled, but soon tendered his resignation to the local and it was accepted. He is now an outspoken Single-Taxer and prints a Single Tax line on his envelopes. In spreading Single Tax literature he has no equal in this community.

#### WHAT SHALL WE DO?

What, then, do I recommend? That we right-about-face, drop individualism, and talk about nothing but the socialism involved in the Single Tax? By no means. Then shall we keep on talking only individualism, seek for converts in only one of the great parties, and have a club or a brick ready for every socialist as soon as he shows his head? By no means. I do not go upon the theory that every man who does not accept either individualism or socialism as a fetich is a mollusk, but upon the theory that "some people are not all alike." And I hold this: The first steps—the steps constituting the affirmative program of the Single Tax—are socialistic; and further, that it is easier to teach a man to take the first steps first than it is to teach him to take the last step first. Many people will not take the last step at all unless they have taken all the other steps in their order. Therefore, unless a man is already an individualist, I maintain that he can best be brought to see the Single Tax from the socialistic point of view. After he has done this, there will be no trouble about the individualistic side—this will follow as of course. The reasons for socializing natural opportunities contain in themselves the reasons for individualizing all other forms of property and kinds of business; but the reverse of this is not true.

However, let those to whom individualism appeals, make their appeal to others through individualism, if in this way they can secure the best results. If failure comes in certain cases, let not prejudice prevent a trial of argument from the other (not opposite) point of view. It may succeed. For true individualism and true socialism are not opposites but complements. They are the two halves of a consistent whole.

Let those who can attain the best results by working in and through one of the old parties continue to work in this field. But at best this is only half the field. Shall we not as a movement occupy the other half also? For mayhap it will prove the more prolific. And above all, will not those who choose to remain in the exclusively individualistic field be kind enough to drop the clubs and the bricks, and in this way leave the other field clear to those whose predilection, ability or judgment shall lead them to work therein?

Let us have no friction, no handicaps of prejudice, and a wider field. It is only in this way that our movement can attain its own. It is only in this way that the dispiriting view of Tolstoy concerning the doctrines of Henry George can be changed into a vision of progress undoubted and untold.

Bloomington, Illinois.

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## PROPAGANDA METHODS.

(*For the Review.*)

By GEORGE L. RUSBY.

There are two chief factors necessary to the effective equipment of a propagandist: one of these, devotion to the cause at stake, is well recognized; the other, though equally important, is often over-looked. This is definite, clear-cut knowledge as to method to be followed in applying this spirit of devotion toward the accomplishment of the end sought.

The Croasdaler is ever watchful for the most effective methods of advancing the Single Tax. It is the writer's belief, based upon careful observation and varied experience, that there is no way in which greater results can be secured, proportionate to effort and expense involved, than in using bank checks bearing a Single Tax text. This method of propaganda is naturally limited to those who have bank accounts, either for private or business purposes. Bank checks pass from hand to hand and the inscription should be chosen with a view to appealing to as many classes as possible. There are many texts that would be appropriate. The following has appeared on all of the writer's checks for the past four years and may be appropriated by anybody else to whom it may appeal:

"Capital and Labor clash because both fail to recognize that they are robbed alike by their common enemy, monopoly, which the Single Tax will destroy."

A rubber stamp could be used, but a printed check is better, and better still is a handsome, lithographed check that appeals to business men, suggesting to them among other things that the maker of the check has a snug bank account. After the first expense of engraving, etc., the cost is but a trifle and one can thereafter feel that these checks are quietly doing their work without outlay of energy, time or money. It is an automatic method of propaganda, running itself, however busy the business man may be; indeed the busier the man, the more checks drawn, and the greater the propaganda opportunity.

A carefully chosen text thus circulated will antagonize nobody, and the writer contends that any business man thus expressing his convictions will not invite trouble for himself, but will to the contrary gain the increased respect of those whose attention may be attracted. Whatever danger there might be in antagonizing the interests of customers is largely absent, from the fact that checks are usually given out for goods purchased, not for goods sold. Tradesmen and merchants are always glad to receive checks, and the better the customer the more attention will be paid to his opinion if circulated in the way suggested.

While discussing the question of propaganda ways and means, it seems appropriate to refer to another and a very important phase of the same. In addition to the question of choice of method, the problem is constantly presenting