

THE SINGLE TAX REVIEW

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

DIRECT LEGISLATION AND SINGLE TAX.

(For the Review.)

By ROBERT TYSON.

I think that many of us Single Taxers have had our attention too exclusively directed to mere direct propagandism, ignoring certain political reforms which are of the greatest value to our cause. The disadvantages of this attitude are three-fold, for—

First, we delay the realization of our wishes by not using the most effective means to get Single Tax principles embodied into law.

Secondly, we lose the benefit of a most important and effective means of indirect propaganda, which under favorable circumstances is ten-fold more effective than ordinary direct methods.

Thirdly, we lose the powerful outside sympathy which comes from extending our own sympathy and help to kindred reforms which are not antagonistic to ours. You remember what Henry George said about the various methods of the political leaders of the Irish Nationalist party? If they had remembered that the Irish land question was also an English land question, and had acted accordingly, England would have been "seething with revolt" against landlordism instead of looking askance upon the Irish claims. I cannot lay my hands upon his exact words just now. Perhaps the editor can quote them for me. But I well remember the words of our great leader: "Sympathy begets sympathy."

Following this line of thought, I earnestly bespeak the hearty, friendly, sympathetic work of Single Taxers on behalf of Direct Legislation by the Initiative and Referendum. Most of us know what this great political reform is; but I may as well briefly refresh some of our memories, thus:

Direct legislation is a direct vote of the people upon proposed laws, municipal or legislative, together with power in the people to order such a vote. "Proposed laws" include proposals to repeal existing laws.

The two main features of direct legislation are (1) The Optional Referendum, which gives the people a veto power over laws passed by municipal councils or the legislature; and (2) The Voters' Initiative, which gives the people power to initiate new measures that the municipal council or the Legislature refuses or neglects to pass.

THE OPTIONAL REFERENDUM.

First, as to the people's veto on certain measures passed by the council or legislature. Provision is made that no such measure shall go into effect for thirty or sixty days, or some such time, from date of passing. If during that

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interval a petition signed by a certain percentage—say five per cent.—of the qualified electors is presented, asking for a popular vote on the measure, then it must be voted on by the people, and if they say No, that measure does not become law. The people have vetoed it. And the mere fact that such a veto exists, makes the council or Legislature very careful what proposed laws they pass.

THE VOTERS' INITIATIVE.

Suppose that circumstances brought some public question to the front, and there seemed a fair chance of a popular majority in its favor. An initiative petition, headed by an exact draft of the proposed law, would be presented to the council or the Legislature, which would by that presentation be obliged to consider and discuss the measure asked for by the petition. If they declined to pass it, then it would have to go to a vote of the people, and would become law if the people said Yes.

But the council or Legislature, when the matter came before them, might say, "We will not pass this bill just as asked for, but we do not object to pass a bill which goes a certain length in the same direction." They would then prepare their modified bill, and the two bills would go to the popular vote, that is, the bill asked for by the initiative petition and the modified bill of the council or Legislature. Then the people—the electors—could accept one or the other, or reject both; and whatever they did would be law.

It may be remarked that the percentage of voters for initiating a new law is usually put somewhat higher than is required for a petition for getting a popular vote on a law passed by the Legislature.

LOCAL OPTION IN TAXATION.

Most Single Taxers are familiar with direct legislation in the narrow shape of local option in taxation; and in that shape it is recognized as a valuable means of putting Single Tax into operation. But what I urge is that better work can be done for Single Tax by taking the wide ground of direct legislation instead of the narrow stand of local option in taxation. Direct legislation has stood the test of experience in Switzerland, Oregon and Utah; it is an easy propaganda; and where it is in full force it is an infallible means of getting a Single Tax law. Oregon, for instance, has full direct legislation, and is a most inviting field for Single Tax effort.

TORONTO'S EXPERIENCE.

Mr. George H. Shibley, President of the People's Sovereignty League, Washington, D. C., is energetically pushing a method of getting direct legislation by pledging candidates. This method has been put in force very successfully in the city of Toronto. I cannot better illustrate my main points than by briefly stating the circumstances:

Two or three months previous to the Toronto municipal election in 1903, about thirty organizations were federated under the name of the Toronto Federation for Majority Rule. A circular letter with literature was sent to the Mayoralty and Aldermanic candidates shortly before the city elections, and favorable replies were received from four mayoralty and about twenty-five aldermanic candidates. Many copies of a "Voters' Agreement" were circulated, and a list of the candidates answering favorably was published in four or five daily papers on the Saturday before election day. The outcome of the elections was direct pledges from Mayor Urquhart and fourteen aldermen; at

least three other aldermen being also favorable. This is a majority of the City Council.

No specific use was made of the powers thus obtained, but when the city elections of 1904 were pending, the Federation for Majority Rule renewed its attentions to the candidates by sending them five questions, with spaces for answers and for the candidate's signature. Following are the questions:

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES.

1. Do you believe that the will of the majority should prevail in this city: "majority" meaning a majority of those entitled to vote and who do vote?

2. To give effect to the will of the majority, are you in favor of the People's Veto by Optional Referendum and of the Direct Initiative by Petition or Collective Request as explained below?

3. Concerning the People's Veto, will you, if elected, use the power of your office to support the Optional Referendum in the City Council in regard to the subject specified below?

4. As regarding the Direct Initiative, will you, if elected, use the power of your office to submit for the decision of the voters any measure that is asked for by eight per cent. of the electors?

5. Will you, if elected, use the power of your office to carry out the will of the majority as expressed by any Referendum votes that may be taken?

Along with these questions was sent the following "statement of objects and methods in brief":

1. *The People's Veto.*—That any by-law or resolution relating to the granting, amending, or renewing of franchises shall wait thirty days in the City Council before being finally passed. If during that time five per cent. of the electors by petition ask for its submission to a popular vote, it shall be so submitted, and the decision of the voters shall be obeyed by the aldermen.

2. *The Direct Initiative.*—That if eight per cent. of the electors by petition present to the City Council any by-law or resolution that they desire to have passed, and the Council declines to pass it, then it must be submitted to a vote of the people not later than the next municipal election, if presented in time, and the aldermen must obey the will of the voters as expressed at the polls.

The result of the 1904 campaign was that at least twenty out of the twenty-three members of the Toronto City Council stood pledged to the Initiative and Referendum as embodied in the above questions.

USING THE PLEDGES.

So far, the movement was not in any sense a Single Tax movement. The thirty federated associations were mostly labor unions; indeed, the only others were the Direct Legislation League, the Proportional Representation Society, the Socialist League, and the Single Tax Association. The Secretary of the Federation was, and is, Mr. James Simpson, a bright young Socialist, since elected a member of the Toronto Board of Education.

During 1904 the Toronto Single Tax Association determined to take advantage of the informal direct legislation rule thus created. Accordingly, they circulated an initiative petition, asking the Mayor and Council of Toronto to submit the following question to a popular vote at the municipal election on January 2nd, 1905:

"Are you in favor of the city obtaining power from the Legislature to exempt dwelling houses from taxation to the extent of seven hundred dollars of the assessed value; said exemption to include all buildings used as dwellings,

but not to apply to the land, and not in any way to affect the right to vote on said property."

At the head of the petition was a brief statement setting out the house famine and the way in which it would be remedied by the \$700 exemption. Below was a space ruled for exactly ten signatures on each petition blank, and the words "Witness to above signatures," with blank for name and address. This wide ruling for just ten signatures, and space for the witness, are useful practical points.

GOOD SOLID WORK.

More than 120 persons circulated these petitions, and nearly four thousand signatures were obtained. Deputations from the Single Tax Association presented the petition to the City Council, and waited upon the committee to which the petition was referred, and again upon the Council. It was with very great reluctance that the Controllers and Aldermen consented to let the question go to the people, but they could not get round their pledges. So they consented.

Then the Single Tax men and women worked like beavers. Bills were posted throughout the city; two sets of "dodgers" were printed, nearly fifty thousand of each, and volunteers came up by the score to make a house-to-house distribution of these "dodgers," one of which was a carefully written four-page pamphlet. In this case amateur work was better than "professional" work. The polling sub-divisions were manned by card distributors. The result is stated in the following editorial from *The Toiler* of January 6th, 1905:

A BIGGER VOTE THAN THE MAYOR'S.

"Nearly sixteen thousand voters of Toronto have endorsed the demand that the City Council shall ask the Ontario Legislature for power to exempt from taxation to the extent of \$700 all buildings used as dwellings. That is two to one in favor of it, and is about a thousand more votes than Mayor Urquhart got. Judging from the number of votes polled, the \$700 exemption was the most popular thing in this election. It was the excellent work of the Single Tax Association, backed by organized labor, that is responsible for this splendid result.

"Now let us follow up this splendid beginning. The City Council is pledged to carry out the will of the majority as expressed in any popular referendum vote. Let us, therefore, see that the \$700 exemption is included in the list of legislative items that the City Council is asking of the Ontario Legislature. Then let us bring all possible pressure to bear on the Legislature to give the people of Toronto legal power to make this beneficent relief of industry from taxation. The people want it. They must have it."

In conclusion, I have to point out that the obtaining of the thousands of signatures opened the door to a Single Tax propaganda the like of which was never known in Toronto before. The movement was supported editorially by an influential evening daily newspaper, *The Star*, which helped to focus public attention on the Single Tax idea. Then the thousands of pages of literature, having a direct bearing on a vote about to be taken, were read with an attention which would never have been given to an abstract propaganda document; hence such a diffusion of Single Tax knowledge as never before in the city. Public interest has been directed to the question, and the events to come in furtherance of the object of the petition will tend to keep it there.

All this is the result of utilizing the Direct Legislation movement. Fellow Single Taxers, the moral of the foregoing is obvious. *Verbum sap.*