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*WHAT ONE SINGLE TAX CONGRESSMAN CAN DO!

(*For the Review.*)

By HON. ROBERT BAKER.

* This article from the pen of Congressman Robert Baker is written at the request of the editor of the REVIEW. It must be apparent to our friends everywhere that no Single Taxer in Congress has ever done as much as the energetic member from Brooklyn. If this has not always been done with perfect tact, it has at least been undertaken with swift appreciation of the importance of the work in hand, with sharp and ready wit, and with ever vigilant and fearless purpose. What has looked like self-advertising in Mr. Baker's methods has been in reality his most effective method of gaining the public ear. He has not been blind to dramatic effects, and he has drawn attention to useful examples of conduct in a Congressman—examples which are so much better than precepts.—THE EDITOR.

What One Single Tax Congressman Can Do! The task set me by the editor of the *Review* is about as difficult a task as one man could well set another. To perform it satisfactorily, i.e., satisfactorily to the readers of this magazine, one must needs be endowed with a rare combination of qualities, aye, with the rarest of qualities, for the task requires the ability to set one's own acts forth in their proper perspective, free on the one hand from any excess or over-statement due to proximity of view, while on the other, avoiding an undue modesty which would ignore or gloss over matters of importance in which the chronicler played the principal part.

Conscious of my inability to steer such a course as will present all essential elements, while avoiding the appearance of egotism, I undertake the task solely because the editor of the *Review* insists that my experience as a member of the 58th Congress is of interest to Single Taxers, and because of his further insistence that no one else has that intimate knowledge which is required to present some of the interesting incidents of my checkered career in the House of Representatives.

Appreciating the difficulty of eliminating the personal equation and of obtaining a proper perspective of the relative importance of acts in which one has played a leading part, yet, I think, there can be no doubt that the one act which had the greatest influence was the return of the B. & O. pass. In this, and in some other matters quickness of decision and rapidity of action were the factors which insured that conspicuity which was its chief merit, and without which it would have availed nothing. Having for years been a propagandist, I naturally looked at it from the

standpoint of its educational possibilities and its usefulness in demonstrating the universality of the intimate relations which the railroads always attempt and usually succeed in establishing between themselves and members of Congress.

Never having been a victim of the delusion that I should be able to secure the enactment of legislation in the direction of the Single Tax, nor even that I should be able to prevent the passage of bills violative of its principles (although subsequent events proved I was able to do this on one occasion, at least), I was not handicapped by the fear that I might sacrifice influence unless I was “safe, sane and conservative” in my political actions. This is not to say that I had no anticipation of the ridicule and abuse any public action on such a matter would provoke, but the educational advantages to follow publicity were great enough to offset its distasteful features.

My brief Congressional experience has confirmed this view, in fact it has convinced me that the fact of a member having a comprehension of the Single Tax would not of itself insure anything more than a perfunctory attention from other members. Of course, with the eloquence and force of a Bryan, or the elegance of diction of a Garrison, one could command both attention and respect. But such men are rare, and we have to deal with average men, men with an unusual grasp of economic questions, it is true, but in other respects average men, and therefore not likely to impress themselves upon a body containing scores of bright men who are almost unknown, or who, at least, exert a minimum of influence in Congress. For, eliminating its willingness to be entertained at almost any time, Congress is essentially matter-of-fact, and academic or polemical discussions must be of a high order to command attention.

What one Single Tax Congressman can do is not therefore an easy question to answer. In the last analysis, I think, it is true that what one Single Taxer in Congress could accomplish would be largely a matter of motive and temperament. By motive, I do not mean his devotion to the Single Tax cause; that is assumed when I speak of a “Single Tax” Congressman. What I mean is, the underlying motive of his conduct, his policy, if you will. That is, whether he desires to accomplish something, however little; then, whether he is looking to a future influence in the party; or whether he is indifferent to results present or prospective, being solely interested in utilizing opportunities as they arise regardless of their effect upon himself, but always with a view to their present educational possibilities.

Temperament, again, is a not unimportant factor. Even some Single Taxers shrink

from the unusual, not to mention the bizarre. To such, opportunities might come, which by reason of the environment, the associations, or the setting, would not be availed of because to attempt the unusual or unique method would be temperamentally distasteful.

My brief experience convinces me of the truth of what I have for years maintained, that there is no effort that Single Taxers can put forth so certain to be productive of good results, so certain to advance the movement as the sending of Henry George men to Congress wherever and whenever possible. The extent of the results will, of course, vary according to the differences in individuals, in their capacity, their industry, and in their unflinching devotion to the ideals of the master, but in any event and in every case, I am certain good results will follow. If there were no other reason we must remember that in our attempts to spread the gospel, to make converts to the faith, we have to deal with human nature.

To illustrate. Even the most casual observer of "politics as they are" must recognize that the demand for men as public speakers and the space accorded them by newspapers, is not mainly a matter of intelligence, ability, wealth or social position, but is almost entirely a matter of political prominence, and particularly of their recent political activities or successes. Let a man be elected a governor, senator or congressman, and immediately he is in demand as a public speaker. All of us can call to mind the names of men who were in the full glare of the sunlight but a few years ago who are now never heard of, because they occupy no longer high office; they have lost their drawing power, and are therefore no longer in demand at banquets, nor their utterances accorded space in the newspapers. The opportunity which was afforded me to present a few Single Tax truths to 150 banquetting newspaper men in Philadelphia a year ago would not have come if I had not been more or less in the public eye. What influence, if any, those remarks had no one will ever know, but to those who believe that no seed is entirely lost, even though sown in such apparently stony ground as among Philadelphia newspaper men and journalistic defenders of monopoly, we may be sure that the seed was not wholly lost. Some among those then present will yet be preaching the gospel of righteousness in taxation. It is worth noting that a few months later the Philadelphia *Inquirer*—whose proprietor sat opposite me at that banquet board—published a striking cartoon depicting the folly of taxing buildings.

Nor should we ignore the influence of " authority " upon the mind of the average man. The ablest Single Tax lecture from one in private life is not likely to attract the

attention given to the utterances of another of far less ability who occupies a more or less conspicuous public position, even when, as in my own case, that conspicuity is not chiefly because of my subscribing to Henry George's philosophy. For it must be understood that while I frequently gave utterance to Single Tax truths, injecting them where probably in the minds of other members they had no bearing upon or relation to the subject in hand, as for instance, the treatment of the Indians, the opening of public lands for settlement, or the question of the unemployed along the wharves of Cincinnati—yet in no case, so far as I know, were those matters mentioned in the newspapers, except in the case of the Rosebud Reservation bill, and then only because of the parliamentary tactics I adopted to defeat the bill. Nevertheless, the prominence given me as to other matters was of direct service to the Single Tax cause, as the newspapers frequently spoke of me as the "Single Tax" Congressman, thus keeping before their readers the fact that Henry George's principles were represented in Congress. Towards the end of the first session, and more particularly during the last session, members frequently enquired what the Single Tax was, among others a prominent member of the Ways and Means Committee, a Republican, asking that I write out a summary of it. This member has since the adjournment written me his thanks for "the first clear conception that I have had of the nature of the Single Tax." But if the Single Tax had never been mentioned by me directly, the educational work that I was able to do along collateral lines has fully repaid the efforts that Brooklyn friends put forth to secure my election. This I think I may say with pardonable pride in the consciousness of having done my best.

It is, of course, difficult to judge of the value of one's own work, but the fact that the one man who it was admitted was not afraid to express his convictions on any issue was a Single Taxer, could not but compel a respect for those principles. The further fact that this "Single Taxer" was able to treat every subject discussed in a way that was to them novel, if not illuminating; that he was able to show, what no one attempted to deny, that such widely different questions as the prevalence of slums in Washington; the rush for land at "land openings"; the claim for reimbursement for a part interest in a lot taken as part of the site of the San Francisco mint fifty years ago; the emigration of farmers from the Northwest to Manitoba; the existence of the Steel Trust; railroad rebates and discriminations, and a dozen other matters, were all due to land monopoly, and that land monopoly was the fruit of unjust taxation, all resulted in the "Single Taxer" acquiring a reputation for profundity which would have been amusing to every exponent of the faith. But beyond this the insistence in season and out of season of the relation of the fundamental truths promulgated by Henry George to all governmental questions, the insistence to both sides of the chamber that their

present methods, or lack of method, was the cause of the many evils generally recognized and deplored, but as to which neither party offered any remedy, all this had its influence which will not easily be eradicated.

Nor must we overlook the influence which the Washington correspondents exert. In a thousand and one ways the readers of their papers are effected by the coloring given to the news of the day by these men. If they had done nothing else than ring the changes in their dispatches upon the words "antipass" and "no-pass," they would nevertheless have done a great educational work, as they were thus, unconsciously, of course, forever keeping the pass evil before the people. As the constant dripping of water ultimately wears away the stone, so these men were doing a work which has already yielded an abundant harvest in the inaugural messages of Folk of Missouri and Hanly of Indiana, and which is probably destined to intensify the feeling of hostility to railroad domination.

To be able to point out in a body where all alike were insisting that river and harbor improvements was the one matter that everybody could cheerfully support, as they were of benefit to the "whole people," that here again not the people, but a limited number, were the ultimate beneficiaries of these expenditures, was also of educational value. The idea was apparently a revelation, each and all having been imbued with the idea that here was a matter in which the benefits were widely diffused. Of course, it is not to be supposed that my insistence that landowners only were the beneficiaries of such expenditures carried such conviction as to lead any to vote against the appropriation; some, I know, were impressed by the argument. In such a body as Congress, composed as it is of men of more than average ability, a large number being leaders in their localities, a much smaller proportion of converts is to be expected than outside, but to influence any in the smallest degree, to break down some of their prejudices on these questions of taxation, is progress, real progress, for it is likely to be the cause of much mental perturbation, and in some cases, let us hope, of ultimate complete conversion.

There is one thing a Single Tax Congressman could do which I did not do, or at least but to a limited extent, and that is to prevent the passage of many, if not all, special privilege bills, bills for the building of bridges across navigable streams, dams for water powers, etc. Practically all such legislation is enacted under the "unanimous consent" rule, i.e., they get recognition under that rule, and one objection prevents their consideration. What would happen if a Single Taxer should always remain in his seat—for that would be necessary to accomplish this -and object to every bill of this

nature that was called up, I do not know, but presumably the rules would be altered so that such measures could be considered without "unanimous consent for their present consideration," for it is inconceivable that the whole House would permit one crank to forever block such legislation. But I took the ground that while I reserved the right to object in the case of particularly vicious measures. I could not expect the House to adopt my view that no such legislation should be enacted, and I did not care to make invidious distinctions except in the case of bills that seemed to be unusually objectionable.

There was one measure that I succeeded in defeating which has given me more satisfaction than perhaps any other one thing I did or tried to do. An attempt was made by Mr. Gardner, of Michigan, to secure consideration for his bill to detail retired officers of the Army and Navy to act as military instructors in public schools. The bill had already passed the Senate, and but for my objection, would certainly have become a law. The Democratic leader enquired if the bill carried an appropriation, and on being informed to the contrary, he demonstrated his ardent opposition to the extension of militarism by announcing that "I have no objection." Fortunately I was on the floor at the moment, and by interposing an objection, prevented its consideration and secured its defeat, as it was then late in the session and its sponsor was unable to again get recognition from the Speaker (which has to be arranged for in advance), and I refused to withdraw my objection to its consideration at any time.

I might add that nowhere and under no circumstances is it more true than in Congress that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." That is, to successfully oppose any measure requiring previous unanimous consent to its consideration, it is necessary to be on the floor at all times and to be ever on the alert to note any attempt that may be made to bring up bills to which objection should be urged.

The more suspicious the bill the more questionable are likely to be the methods adopted to rush it through. These take the form at times of bogus messages from the Senator of your State, or the chairman of some important committee, to come to their committee room as they have an important matter to discuss, or, the telephone is utilized to get members from the floor for a minute or two. Any of these, or similar methods, succeed if they induce the temporary absence of the member known to be opposed to the little project it is hoped to pass. The telephone dodge was tried on me on one occasion, but I refused to respond to the call, so that the particular measure it was thus hoped to rush through was not called up. In saying that one must be on the floor at all times I do not mean that he must be there every moment of the five or five

and a half hours that the session usually lasts. Sometimes it is safe to be absent for two or three hours, as for instance when an appropriation bill is being considered in Committee of the Whole, but it frequently happens that for whole days it is not safe to be away for a minute, as the order of business may undergo a change while your back is turned, and it then becomes possible to get consideration for a bill which five minutes before apparently had no chance of being reached that day.

All this naturally suggests what a number of Single Taxers could do in Congress. With five, six or more of the faith elected, it would be possible for them to arrange that one, at least, should always be on the floor. It would then be possible for one or more of the others to conduct an investigation into suspicious measures. Although almost every member has some pet bill which he desires to pass, it was surprising to find that my objections, when made, were the subject of more favorable than unfavorable comment, more than one member saying "By Jove, I wish there were more members who weren't afraid to hold these bills up!" Some of them even intimated that they would have retained more of their self-respect if they had not got themselves into a position where they dare not object.

To what extent this was in the minds of members during the last two days of the session when at least fifty republicans personally expressed their regret that I was not to be back in the 59th, I do not know, but it was nevertheless gratifying to feel that my course of determined hostility to matters and measures which violated my principles, no matter from which side of the House they were proposed, had apparently created respect rather than dislike. Not less than a score were quite warm in their assertion, expressed of course, in different language, that "While I do not agree with all you have said here, yet there are some things (or many things) in which I agree with you, and think you are dead right!"

But I take it that my experiences are only valuable if they suggest what is possible for other Single Taxers to do in Congress, and these incidents are only mentioned to prove that one can be an economic Ishmaelite there without sacrificing the personally pleasant relations with members, which is one of the chief attractions of Congress to so many. A new member, and particularly one of the minority, can hope to do nothing except of an educational nature. As your Single Taxer is primarily a propagandist he is not handicapped to the extent that nearly all new members are, for it is needless to say that few new members go to Congress with original ideas, and if they have a hobby they find it convenient to drop it.

With the practical certainty that the democrats will not be in a hopeless minority in the 60th Congress, and with the possibility that they may even control that body, it is of great importance for Single Taxers to consider how many and who of their number they can get nominated by the democrats in districts offering a possibility of election, I say possibility and not probability advisedly. For, in the first place, districts that on the result of last year's election are now regarded as certainly republican will elect democrats next year, and an election in such a district will have a deeper significance to the leaders of the party in Congress than would be attached to the election of a Single Taxer in a democratic district.

With only one democrat in the 59th Congress from Ohio, two from Indiana, one from Illinois, one from Pennsylvania, and with none from Delaware, Michigan, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska and California, there ought to be possibilities of democratic nominations for Single Taxers where they are in these several localities.

If but one or two of our faith are elected and the democrats control the House, then their influence is not likely to be much greater than was my own in the recent Congress, for new men command little attention and exert but small influence. But should there be six, seven, or ten in the 60th Congress, then we might reasonably hope that they would exert an influence out of all proportion to their numbers. Even four or five would carry considerable weight if Congress is close, their votes being necessary to organize the House, and they would be able to do much to shape the policies of the party. With the certainty that some of those from the South who are the oldest in point of service will, by virtue of the important chairmanships which they will demand, dominate the party's policies unless there is a compact, it is of the highest importance that our friends everywhere should carefully study the political conditions in their own locality to see whether it is not possible to bring about Single Tax nominations by the democrats.

Under the custom which prevails in both parties of giving the important chairmanships to those who are the oldest in service almost regardless of qualifications, the plutocrats will throw all their influence to strengthen those men so as to discredit the party before the country. We should be treated to the spectacle of a democratic Congress elected to undo the class legislation of forty years of republican rule temporizing with and even palliating these evils, because controlled by the Bourbons of the South. On the other hand elect a dozen or a score of Single Taxers, each first of all devoted to fundamental democracy, men who will stand boldly, unflinching for our principles, regardless of the possible effect upon their political

future, and they will not only give courage to the progressive element of the party, but they may be able to checkmate and nullify the attempt of the reactionaries to deliver the organization into the hands of the plutocrats.

The vote shown in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Colorado and Missouri last Fall, clearly demonstrates increasing radicalism and power of discrimination. The elections in Chicago and in Kansas, Kan., (where an oldtime Single Taxer, W. W. Rose, was chosen Mayor) also indicate the rising tide. To give this growing radicalism force and direction in Congress we must do what the radical democrats have done in those two cities, put Single Taxers forward as democratic candidates.

We must, of course, continue our propaganda work, but let us emulate the plutocrats, who months, sometimes years in advance pick the men who at the right moment are to be brought forward as candidates. Let our friends throughout the country do this and they will be surprised to wake up after the Congressional elections of 1906 and discover that the Single Tax philosophy has at last become a positive if not controlling force in Congress.