

Broadsides  
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### **A Socialist's View of the Single Tax.**

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THERE HAS BEEN a strong disposition among some Socialist critics to regard Henry George as nothing more than a charlatan, while others think that a passing sneer will dispose of the theory of Single Tax. Both of these views I deem wholly wrong. Henry George in his "Progress and Poverty" has given us a most brilliant criticism of the present system — more brilliant in some respects than that of Karl Marx. And the idea of Single Tax has taken considerable root in some Australian colonies, especially in New Zealand.

Marxism naturally must oppose the Single Tax theory because the latter is a reform of the present system according to a scientific plan invented by a certain man, while Socialists know that human society is an organism; it is a matter of growth and of evolution. The Socialists simply point to history — to the economic development, the centralization of property, the trusts, etc. — and then merely state the fact that we are growing into Socialism, that Socialism is going to be the next phase of our civilization.

But before all things Socialists contend that Single Tax would not change anything in favor of the propertyless masses — that as a matter of fact, it would infinitely sharpen competition and sharpen it in favor of the man with ready money. From this point of view Single Tax has been declared by Socialist authors "an attempt to exploit Socialist ideas in favor of the mobile capital."

Let us have a short and concise statement of the two schools of thought.

Socialism is the collective ownership of the means of production and distribution. It is based solely upon the present mode of production on a large scale — production with the help of machinery. Formerly hand labor and individual efforts produced the necessities of mankind. Today machine labor and social or associated labor are the means of producing these necessities. The present system of social production by

individual ownership has produced two classes — the propertyless class and the capitalist class. A class of toilers who produce all wealth and have none and a class of idlers or superfluous rulers who get it all. Socialism holds that the structure of our social institutions is always determined by the way we get our living. And while in that former time it was the imperative duty of the government to protect the individual in the possession of the property he had produced; so, today, it is equally the duty of the government to protect associated labor, that is to say, the whole body of working people, in the possession of the products of their toil. We further point to the economic evolution — the trusts, combines, etc. — and say: If so much of what has been considered private property is to be absorbed in great monopolistic ownership — and there is nothing that can stop it — then, if we are to remain a politically free people, the inevitable outcome will be that the people must take possession collectively of the production and distribution. And this is called Socialism.

Now what is Single Tax?

Henry George explains it as follows:

"We propose to abolish all taxes save one single tax levied on the value of land, irrespective of the value of the improvements in or on it.

"What we propose is not a tax on real estate, for real estate includes improvements. Nor is it a tax on land, for we would not tax all land, but only land having a value irrespective of its improvements, and would tax that in proportion to that value.

"When we tax houses, shops, money, furniture, capital or wealth in any of its forms, we take from individuals what rightfully belongs to them. We violate the right of property, and in the name of the state commit robbery. But when we tax ground values we take from individuals what does not belong to them, but belongs to the community, and which cannot be left to individuals, without the robbery of other individuals."

Now there is no doubt that Socialists and Single Taxers agree on some points, only according to the teachings of history and political economy the Single Taxers put the cart before the horse.

We want to abolish the wage system. In order to do that, it is necessary to abolish private property in capital. According to our ideas land is an important bastion in the fortress capital. And it is not simply we who maintain this, but some capitalists also fear that George's land theories may hurt the present system and that is the reason they denounce him as a Socialist. George, and even more so his German disciple,

Fleischheim, would like to make a compromise between individualism and Socialism. But their compromise is a failure. They would begin with the socialization of that part of the national wealth which is least ripe for it, because it is the least concentrated of any, where there are still over seven million owners of farms in the United States. This alone stamps "Single Tax" as impossible. The collective ownership of land will be the last, not the first, measure of Socialism.

Collectivism is now possible and necessary in very many branches, especially in those that have reached the form of a monopoly or trust — as Henry George rightly indicates — and have thereby proved that they have outgrown the competitive system.

Furthermore, collectivism is now possible and necessary in mining of every description and in the ownership and management of all the means of transportation and in the various public utilities.

But in our history Socialism in land is not possible now and will not be for a long time to come.

For reasons not necessary to explain here, the effect of new inventions in agricultural machinery has only tended to strengthen the middle-sized farm. Many scientists and especially agronomists (specialists in agriculture) claim that the future in agriculture belongs to intensive farming, not to farming on a large scale. At any rate, the farmers will for very many reasons be the last class to be expropriated by society. One very good reason is that the farming class is so numerous that it would simply be impossible to do so. The other reason is that it is the aim of Socialism to return to the workers the instruments of production they have to use, and in the case of the farmers an expropriation would mean that we should take the land from the present owners and forthwith give it back to them.

The farmers as a class naturally object to the Single Tax as much and more than they do to Socialism, before they understand it. The only difference is that they object to Single Tax a great deal more after they understand it. And there surely would be no cause for the proletariat to fight the farmers for the single tax. Land is still to be had very cheaply in many places in the northern part of the state of Wisconsin, at from three to five dollars an acre — in the southern states it is still cheaper. In 1898 land in Ashland County, Wis., was advertised at 50 cents per acre — it was to be sold for the tax, a "single tax" in that particular case. Fifty cents an acre, and only one-fourth of that in cash — that is almost as good as "free land" under the rule of single tax — in

some respects even better. But what benefit was the cheap land to the printer or the weaver out of a job? As A. M. Simons in his very readable pamphlet "Single Tax vs. Socialism" (Kerr & Co., Chicago) very pertinently remarks: "So long as capital remained private property and its owners continued to rule, there would be only one thing that the single taxer could do with his "free land" — he could take a sharpened stick and cultivate it, and even then he would have to watch out that some one did not get a corner on the sticks and leave him to scratch with his finger nails."

To sum up: Single Tax has some good points — the Single Taxers have criticised the present system severely and helped to awaken the conscience of the nation. But it is no panacea for anything.

Single Tax would not abolish our cut-throat competition — competition is considered by Henry George a cornerstone of civilization. On the contrary, Single Tax would sharpen competition. Single Tax would not do away with interest, nor abolish wage slavery. The main difference between the present system and Single Tax would be that instead of many million landlords we would have only one landlord — the state — but the state would give the land only to the men who would be able to pay the "single tax," or to make improvements upon it. In every instance this would be the man with the "ready cash." Nowadays at least one poor person in a great many can sometimes inherit a piece of land and hold it, or sell it — this would be out of the question under the Single Tax. Only rich men would have a right to have and to hold valuable property.