

The SINGLE TAX

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THE SINGLE TAX.

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"To raise and maintain wages is the great object that all who live by wages ought to seek, and working men are right in supporting any measure that will attain that object. Nor in this are they acting selfishly, for, while the question of wages is the most important of questions to labourers, it is also the most important of questions to society at large. Whatever improves the condition of the lowest and broadest social stratum must promote the true interests of all. Where the wages of common labour are high, and remunerative employment is easy to obtain, prosperity will be general; where wages are highest there will be the largest production and the most equitable distribution of wealth. There will invention be most active, and the brain best guide the hand; there will be the greatest comfort, the widest diffusion of knowledge, the purest morals, and the truest patriotism. If we would have a healthy, a happy, an enlightened, and a virtuous people—if we would have a pure Government, firmly based on the popular will and quickly responsive to it—we must strive to raise wages and keep them high."—Henry George, "Protection or Free Trade."

OUR MISSION.

IN this, our first appearance, we are not very ambitious-looking, but we are nevertheless ambitious to be up and doing in the good cause of Land Restoration. The time, we believe, is opportune for a monthly pronouncement by the Scottish Single Taxmen. In Scotland and England, in America, and in our Australasian Colonies the Single Tax method of Land Restoration is being advocated with genuine healthy persistency, and the agency of the press is everywhere being enlisted an advocate. In America there are now some fifty or more Single Tax Newspapers; and in the Colonies a vigorous propaganda is being well maintained by several prints exclusively devoted to its service. But what is more particularly pleasing, is, that in New Zealand a first instalment—a small tax on land values—has been secured and has worked marvellously well; has realised to the full the expectations of Single Taxers. Referring

to the subject, the Premier of the Colony recently said:—

"The Government said to the struggling settler they would exempt his improvements. To the one above him they said, 'You shall not be touched by the progressive tax;' and to those who held large tracts of country, mostly unimproved, keeping cattle and sheep where there should be smiling homes and happy people, they said, 'Pay a little more to the taxation of the country.' Their opponents said they were going in for confiscation. There was to be a revolution, there would be no money and no employment in New Zealand, it was to go down and down until it was last in the Australasian group. What is the result to-day? New Zealand is at the top and the other colonies down below. . . . Through our progressive tax great improvements are taking place in this part of the colony. I notice paragraphs speaking of the number of ploughmen engaged, steadings going up, and improvements generally being made at a most rapid rate. This is just what we wanted. Ploughmen have work, carpenters have work, and there is an improvement in the social, commercial, and political position of the people."

So that we have commenced in this far away isolated New Zealand our journey through the Single Tax avenue to economic freedom and to industrial emancipation. Encouraging work truly. The first step gained. It may seem a weak and hesitating advance, but it will make the next step forward easier, and it is a finger-post on the way not likely to be ignored. The Single Tax, briefly, is a proposal to take the values of land, apart from improvements, in taxation, for public purposes, and to relieve industry of the burdens of taxation. It is a simple remedy, merely a transferring of taxation from labour and the products of labour to land values. But we claim for it that it will also solve the labour problem, and that this solution of the labour problem is the key to the solution of the wider social problem now confronting civilisation, and which, as John Ruskin says, "Society must settle or it will settle Society." The labour problem has arisen and is with us because of an unjust distribution of wealth. This and other minor tributaries have their source, we believe, in land monopoly. It is easy to see, given this primary monopoly of land, how all other hurtful monopolies are reared. Land monopoly keeps pace with the "slaves of the lamp of knowledge" that invention brings, and but quickens the advance to greater and greater inequalities. Landowners are induced to keep desirable land out of use in anticipation of securing a greater future value. Labour and capital are thrown out of employment. Idle hands and idle lands add greater complica-

tions. But to those who care to examine into these phenomena the labour problem is after all but the land question.

The Single Tax will shatter these expectations of the landowners to get more, as more is produced, by putting a period to their taxing powers, and at the same time open up the land, free from monopoly charges, to all, on terms of perfect equality. Trade depression has become chronic now, and has a wide-world footing. It means to the wage-earners, who suffer by it, poverty of the worst kind—undeserved poverty. "Organisation, by all means," says Ruskin, "but before you have organisation you must have honesty." Just so: and a first step to a fair quantity of this commodity is to abolish this undeserved poverty. We believe land monopoly to be the bottom cause of all the trouble, and we urge the remedy advanced by Henry George, the Single Tax, as the only feasible method for the destruction of land monopoly, and for opening up, at the point of least resistance, the natural and only opportunities to labour—the land. Our work will be to keep our question and what is being done with it the wide world over well to the front, and to guide the loose ideas abroad on the land question generally. We shall endeavour each month to provide a faithful account of the progress of the movement, and to appear every time in an attractive garb. We, therefore, appeal with confidence to our members, to land reformers, and to all sympathetic political and social reformers to spread the *Single Tax* in every direction possible, and so help us to bring to a speedy end this primary inequality—Private Property in Land.

MICHAEL DAVITT ON THE LAND QUESTION.

LANDLORDISM THE ROOT EVIL.

LOWER WAGES, STRIKES, AND SOCIAL MISERY ALL TRACEABLE TO A SINGLE SOURCE.

A POWERFUL INDICTMENT.

The following is an excerpt from a letter by Mr. Michael Davitt to the *Daily Chronicle*:—

No intelligent working man can give a moment's rational study to the Labour problem of these countries without discovering where

THE ROOT EVIL OF OUR INDUSTRIAL SYSTEM lies. Underpaid toil, the social wretchedness associated with the labouring poor, the misery of the unemployed, and the shame and suffering of the pauperised workers of the community

are referable for cause and existence to laws which enable a small class of men to own and control the land and the mineral wealth of the United Kingdom. It is in the rent-taxes levied upon the use of these natural agencies which are the very life of our social and industrial organisms, where low wages, depression, and strikes really originate. The outcry against "Capital" on the part of advanced labour advocates tends to disguise an older and more formidable enemy of Labour, and landlords not a few are astute enough to send this clamant Labour on this seductive scent in order to divert attention from a system which is in fealty the parent of capitalism and all its works and pomps. The capitalist is the objective agency whereby the worker is made to surrender to profit what a just system of wealth distribution would award him labour, but the efficient cause of this underpaid sweat and toil is found in the laws which enable an idle interest to tax both capital and labour, and to dictate as well the conditions under which one or both shall prosecute the enterprise of wealth production.

To the unthinking portion of our wage-earning classes landlordism is an institution which concerns only the aristocracy, farmers and agricultural labourers. Its pernicious economic ramifications throughout the entire industrial life of the community are seldom or ever referred to or recognised on labour platforms. Yet from the banker and merchant in the City to the pedlar of pencils in the Strand EVERY MAN, WOMAN, AND CHILD WORKER IN LONDON, AND IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AS WELL, PAYS A TAX TO SOME LANDLORD,

which operates as a deduction from profit and a reduction of wages. The wool in our clothing, the leather in our shoes, the iron or wood of the miner's pick, or the editor's pen, every tool with which a day's work is performed in every branch of industry, every piece of machinery which manufacturers produce, and every inch of land on which a workshop or an office stands, every warehouse where merchandise is bartered, every shop in which food is sold, or clothing made, have all to pay rent, directly or indirectly to landlordism in one or more of its many forms of application. The total annual sum which is thus deducted from the yearly earnings of the entire industrial community of these countries is variously estimated at from £300,000,000 to £500,000,000,

or not much short of an amount equalling eighty per cent of the entire annual pay of the whole of the wage-earning classes of the United Kingdom. When it is borne in mind that the people of London are compelled to pay some £12,000,000 a year in ground-rents alone the above figures will come well within the range of possible accuracy. We need only call to mind the number of other great industrial centres in Great Britain and the economic value of the limited areas on which they stand; the royalties represented in the coal and other ore of our mineral produce; in the gas consumed in workshops and dwellings; in the manufactured iron in mills, in ships, and implements of every kind; and to add the £60,000,000 or £70,000,000 levied upon agricultural industry, to grasp an idea of the stupendous burden which an antiquated feudal system lays upon the shoulders of British and Irish industry every year.

What services, direct or indirect, are rendered to the 40,000,000 people in these islands by the landlord class, which can lay any reasonable claim to the privileges of taxing to this extent the produce of the toil and enterprise of the industrial democracy? Do they confer any single national, social, moral, educational, or material benefit upon the community from whom this tribute is extorted year by year? Even Mr. Stead, who has recently come with characteristic chivalry to the rescue of the aristocracy, would I think, find it difficult to specify the public virtue or services which would constitute a moral or economic equivalent for

THE BURTHEN WHICH LANDLORDISM LAYS UPON THE PRODUCING CLASSES.

And when we remember all which this idle interest is privileged to take from the annual wealth of these countries, and measure this vast sum with the comparative smallness of the

total amount of all the sums which have been in question between employers and wage-earners in all the Labour disputes of the last twenty years, is it not a matter of amazement that underpaid workers have not focussed their attention and efforts upon the sweeping away of these antiquated land laws which have been fruitful only in pauperism, half starved labour, and the anarchy of strikes, and kindred contentions?

To say, as one Irish member did the other night, that the Land League would have no existence were it not for Irish absenteeism, is only to manifest a total ignorance of the fundamental purpose of the Irish land movement. The tenants and land workers of Ireland rose against the whole system of landlordism, by which the chief industry of the country was being bled to death—a country already reduced by this social cancer to the lowest degree of material progress of any country in Europe. To continue to support such a rent-extracting system as it existed before the Land League would have amounted to industrial suicide on the part of Ireland.

Absenteeism is the least of the major evils of landlordism. In addition to being rack-renters and evictors

THE IRISH LANDLORDS HAVE BEEN MODELS OF HOW TO MAKE LIFE WORSE THAN ORNAMENTALLY USELESS.

The flunkysim which they breed, the contempt for work or business pursuits, which is characteristic of the class have had a more pernicious influence upon the social life of Ireland than the absence of the Clanricardes, Sligoes, and others who choose to live in other lands could ever exercise.

It is much the same in Great Britain. The effects may not be as apparent with you as they are with us, but the main evil of the system works its results in more insidious ways. It has, if possible, a deadlier hold upon the industrial vitals of Great Britain than upon Ireland; and it will not be the first or the last of the services which Irish agitations have rendered to the cause of the industrial classes of England, Scotland, and Wales, if one outcome of the Home Rule movement should be a constitutional revolt in Great Britain also against landlordism, both in land and in government.—Yours truly,

MICHAEL DAVITT.

Ballybrack, Co. Dublin, Aug. 23.

THE SCOTTISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT BILL.

In all the numerous clauses of this Bill no mention is made whatever of giving powers to the new local councils, to be created, to tax land values for the upkeep of local government. These councils will quicken life in every district. The control and management of local affairs will certainly necessitate increased rates. Drainage, more effective lighting, the making of roads, and other improvements, spell more taxation. Now, a greater expenditure of public money in this way is certain to enhance the value of all vacant land, and the users of such land will require to pay this increased price. Every improvement made will make the landowners richer and the people co-relatively the poorer. Desirable land will be held out of use in anticipation of a further rise in value in due time. Surely it is time such injustice should cease. If public improvements add a greater value to land is it not fair that such value should be taken in taxation to pay for such improvements? With-outpower to tax these values for the uses of the communities who create them, what is the good of this new local government constitution? What is the good of saying "here are superior tools to cultivate your garden," if the increased produce of the gardeners is to be taken from them by those who own the garden, in increased rents? Mere political freedom does not tend towards a more equitable distribution of wealth, even though it be the widest possible concession. Past legislation in this regard teaches us this. Poverty and the unemployed keep pace with the extension of the franchise and the creation of democratic constitutions. Just now we have a local debt of over £200,000,000. The actual money held on loan by the Glasgow Corporation

in May last was £6,374,813. The land values of Glasgow are computed to be close on £2,000,000 per annum. One hundred years ago they were less by at least two thirds of that amount. The rates fall exclusively on occupancy and property. The expenditure of the rates raises and maintains the City's ground values. Fancy monopoly prices reign supreme on vacant sites. Builders cannot build on the landowner's terms, and the people are huddled together in narrow streets and are severely rack-rented. If any improvement comes to a locality, such as the Phoenix Recreation Grounds, up go the rents all round. Such will be the fate of the new Parish Councils. Their every effort will be met by increased rates and higher rents, and in the fulness of time, should they extend their boundaries, their people will suffer as the Glasgow people are suffering.

The official Liberal party have declared "in favour of taking the values of land for public purposes." Why do the Government frame such a measure and ignore altogether all mention of this much desired reform? Municipal bodies all over the country are discussing the question of getting powers from Parliament to give effect to it. It cannot be much longer ignored by "the powers that be." The Government have missed a splendid opportunity of showing their supporters that they are prepared when occasion occurs to carry into effect the various items of the Liberal programme. But however much we may regret this failure on the part of the Government, it is the duty of all reformers to speak straight out, and it is pleasing to know that Mr. A. D. Provand, M.P. for Hutchesontown, after the second reading will move

"That it be an instruction to the Committee that they have power to insert in the Bill provisions providing that Parish Councils to be created under the Bill may have power and authority given to them to assess and collect rates on the values of lands situate within their respective areas, after deducting the value of improvements on the same."

Let the other Scotch Radical Members support Mr. Provand, and let the local Liberal organisations throughout the country advise their M.P.'s accordingly. To have the question brought before the Government in the House of Commons is the best service that can be rendered, and Mr. Provand deserves well of social reformers for thus taking occasion by the hand.

THE CROFTER COMMISSION IN SUTHERLANDSHIRE.

JOHN MURDOCH'S PLEA FOR NO RENTS.

The *Northern Ensign*, Wick, May 15, 1894:—At the Crofter Commission at Dornoch, Mr. Murdoch appeared for some of the crofters, and on being called upon to give his summing up after the evidence had been heard, he spoke to the following effect:—

Mr. Commissioner and gentlemen Assessors,—Much as I might have to say in dealing with crofters' rents on the historic estate of Sutherland, I mean to have pity on you by not asking you to listen to what you may have read elsewhere. There will be repetitions, but there shall be none excepting such as are inevitable. It is admitted on every hand that

THE CROFTERS ACT IS A MARVEL OF LEGISLATION,

coming from the Parliament of a country dominated by a feudal landed proprietary. The conferring of fixity of tenure on small holding tenants-at-will should be accepted as an outstanding proof that a higher Power rules in these lower affairs, and an encouragement to honest men to persevere in the face of all opposition until justice has been won. What has been obtained has been won by the weak and poor in a struggle with the rich and powerful, backed by armed battalions and solemn judges in the highest courts of the nation.

THE RENTS OF UTTERLY INADEQUATE HOLDINGS.

Clearly the smallness and badness of the holdings are the first circumstances to be taken into consideration in determining what is a fair rent, or whether any rent at all should be laid on. I am not going to set up a very high standard