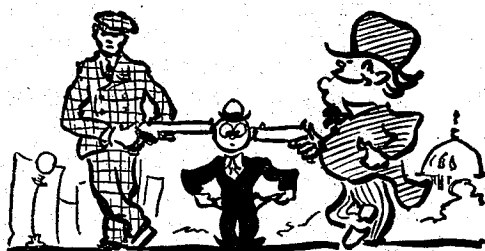


## HCL for the Straphanger

"THE FIVE-CENT FARE is important to an awful lot of us people," said a bookkeeper.

He was jolted by the campaign to increase fares in New York's subways, buses, and trolley cars to 10c a ride, or two rides for 15c. The campaign has been in real estate committees for years and more actively since the city took over the transit facilities. (See prediction in *The Freeman* of May, 1940, page 149.)

The real estate committees feel correctly that the popular political appeal of the five-cent fare has faded. The vote-getting power of the five-cent fare issue is now balanced by the influence of landlords for lower land and building taxes and by the desire of the politicians to have thirty million dollars more to spend on city projects.



From the political point of view, this 30 or 45 million to be obtained by a fare boost is a new form of taxation. In this connection the politicians sometimes state their problem as "how to pluck the most feathers with the least squawking."

From the ordinary straphanger's point of view a tax is a burden and this tax is as bad a kind of taxation as can be devised, for it falls most heavily on those least able to bear it. There is nothing about the tax to make it easier for riders to pay. If the worker can easily spare the five cents a day tax the evil consequences are mitigated, the evil itself is not. If, on the other hand, he does not have it, he has a serious problem, a great hardship, and a worse evil.

Five cents a day may mean only giving up a cup of coffee to save a hard forty block walk. But that cup of coffee may mean all the difference between a good day's work and a dragging, inefficient waste of time.

As a tenant, everyone is paying for public services in the site rent included in the sum he pays

his landlord. To the extent that the subway service has already been paid for, it is unjust and therefore bad practice to charge for it once more in the fare.

"But," says my friend, the elevator man, "why not get the nickels of Bronxville commuters and visiting salesmen from Chicago?" Only because their contribution for social services has been made toward the land values under office buildings and hotels. If you charge them twice, their incentive to come to the city is diminished.

Without our municipal services and other advantages people would not come to the city; this would diminish trade, and rents would go down. Witness the decline in New York rents when business firms decided that they could get better social services and management in other cities.

The landlords are clamoring for this fare rise form of tax in the hope that they can obtain a corresponding reduction in their own land and building taxes. A nice piece of legerdemain; if it works, it should command the support of all landlords on the basis of immediate gain, without regard to justice or ethics. But the labor unions have their eyes on this large plum, and the fare rise is now advocated as a means towards a substantial wage increase of many millions. Won't the unions favor the higher fare?

Landlords, tenants, unions, and all workers might well study carefully the effects of the economic change they are proposing. The fare rise may be like "apples of Sodom that crumble at the touch."

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