

ATTITUDE OF SOCIALISTS AND LABOR MEN TO THE SINGLE TAX.

(For the Review.)

By F. C. R. DOUGLAS.

The message of Henry George came to this country a quarter of a century after the establishment of Free Trade, when the extravagant hopes based on the isolated policy of Free Exchange had been falsified, and when thoughtful men were looking around for a new policy of economic regeneration. It was the vivifying force which gave rise to the modern school of Radicalism or Economic Liberalism, but it also gave an impetus to the men who with a tendency to Socialism were yet dissatisfied with the old doctrinaire Socialism. Anyone who cares to read the constitution of the Fabian Society and the Fabian Essays can see the mark of Henry George writ large. This is particularly noticable in the first of these essays which might easily be taken for a Single Tax pamphlet, and also another work of G. B. Shaw's, "The Impossibility of Anarchism." Yet the influence of the early socialists still persisted in the Fabian Society, so that in many cases attention as diverted to the purely secondary questions of organization and legislative restrictions, and the influence of Marx was predominant in the ranks of the Social Democratic Federation.

In addition to these purely socialist bodies there was the great army of organized labor which had been formed originally for the purpose of collective bargaining, but which, as the difficulties of that became more evident, grew dissatisfied and began to turn their attention to legislative matters. Into their ranks came a few of the ardent Socialists, generally of the Marxian type, and captured the control of the organization, though in no case probably did they win a majority of the members to Socialism. From this arose the labor party which with the money levied from the members of the Trade Unions was able to run its own candidates, and in 1906 succeeded in sending to the House of Commons 30 members. These members have for the most part co-operated with the Liberals, and have helped to give a certain Socialist tendency to recent legislation. This Socialism is, however, sporadic, and tends to appear even among the Conservatives. There is in it nothing of a constructive nature.

While the teaching of George was thus aiding the Socialists by acting on unformed convictions of those who saw in it little more than the advocacy of a great change and a challenge to a form of "property" which they did not distinguish clearly from other property, it was also acting upon the Liberal party and on unattached and reflective minds everywhere; so that in a short time the taxation of land values came to be a plank in the Liberal party's platform, but a minor plank until the Budget of 1909-10. When

the curtain is rung down on Home Rule and the other measures which are the legacy of a past generation, the land question becomes once more the dominant issue of British politics.

The Land Values group in the House of Commons contains about half the Liberal members, though most of the latter would indignantly deny any leaning toward the Single Tax. Yet it is plain that opinion among labor men and Socialists is turning once again toward the ideal of economic freedom proclaimed in "Progress and Poverty," and though the leaders may still remain Socialists the rank and file are becoming dissatisfied with their leaders. Of this fact the Syndicalist movement is a striking proof. This discontent arises from the realization of the palliative nature of Socialist or quasi-Socialist legislation, and the belief that along the old lines of advance no other legislation could be hoped for. But palliatives are of only temporary efficacy, and the mind of the common people turns once more to look for the root of the evil and for a Radical remedy. It now becomes more and more evident to them that the land question is the bottom one; that the system of land tenure determines both the production and distribution of wealth.

The differences between Anarchist, Socialist and Single Taxer may be resolved into a difference in the view taken of the functions of government. The one says "no government," the other says "all government," but the Single Taxer says, "I believe that government has certain functions. By careful research I hope to discover what these functions are, and then I will endeavor to restrict government to them." It is now becoming fairly clear that the function of government is to abolish monopoly where it has grown up by legislative restriction, tariff or special privilege, or where the monopoly is natural and indestructible to take the monopoly profit for the equal benefit of the whole community. The land monopoly is evidently the greatest, possibly the only natural monopoly; the value of land measures the value of this monopoly; and the easiest way of securing the monopoly profit is the Single Tax way. In land value ought to be included the value of franchises, for they consist in general in the exclusive right to the use of certain strips of land, though land values and franchise values are often spoken of separately for the sake of emphasis. The greatest state-created monopoly is that created by tariff or tax of any kind. The first and most important step towards reform is then to abolish all other taxation, and to tax land values alone. To this view thoughtful men all over the world are turning, and we may say that to a first approximation the problem of what are the functions of government has been solved.

Yet to this view many of the Socialists would not agree, not because they would not say that monopoly should not be dealt with by government, but because they would say that there is and must be even under Single Tax a monopoly of capital. I believe that this attitude is due to the confusion between real capital and spurious capital which George deals with in "Progress and Poverty" (Book 111, Chapter IV.) and to the failure to see that the

reason why capital is so limited in amount and concentrated into the hands of a few at present is that the system of land holding has determined both the production and distribution of capital.

In the meantime, however, though in the country most of the Labor members profess themselves land nationalizers, talk of compensation—an illogical position for men who profess a belief in the injustice of private property in land—they co-operate in Parliament in helping forward the policy of the "Land and Taxation Reform Memorial." It may be that some day the Single Taxers will entirely part company with them; in the meantime we work together, but before that time comes it is likely that there will be a great revolution in the ranks of the Labor party itself when many that hold our view of the functions of government will come back to us.

Mr. Douglass has recently been appointed a member of the V. C. staff and will assist Mr. Paul in the editorship of *Land Values*, organ of the Single Taxers of Great Britain.

THE PARABLE OF THE BRIDGE.

(For the Review.)

By CHARLES T. ROOT.

There was once in a distant country a town through which a river ran. To get across this river the townspeople built a bridge. A shrewd chap whose name history does not accurately record—it was Craft or Graft, or something like that—thought he saw a chance for a good stroke of business. So he took his stand in the middle of the bridge and demanded a small payment from each pedestrian and each vehicle that crossed. The passengers, supposing that the enterprising toll-gatherer had been placed there by the proper authorities, gave up their coppers without demur. As the intelligent reader will readily perceive, the "business" paid well from the start. The town grew and the receipts of the toll-taker grew with it. The increasing traffic soon necessitated repairs to the structure and the town had to make them or run the risk of damage suits. Having no surplus funds for the purpose, the authorities had to levy a tax on all the citizens, whether users of the bridge or not, to raise the money. For some reason, which is now lost in the mists of antiquity, nobody seemed to be "onto" the toll gatherer's little enterprise, so he just paid his individual share of the bridge maintenance tax and kept right on sawing wood.

At length, having gathered a modest competence through his honest toil, and desiring to travel and enjoy himself, Mr. Graft decided to sell out, and having found a purchaser who, impressed by the exhibit made to him