

Land and Freedom

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Current Comment

THOSE who doubt the progress of the Henry George movement must be blind to a number of significant happenings. Under the new public works law all idle land in the Cuban Republic will pay a tax. This is the first time in the history of the Republic, it is stated, that taxes have been assessed on idle land. Over 40,000 lots in the city of Havana will be affected as will thousands of acres throughout the country.

NEW ORLEANS has begun the most elaborate project yet planned by the city. It contemplates the development of the shores of Lake Pontchartrain and the reclamation of new lands from the lake, these lands to include public parks and parkways. The idea is to make the project pay for itself by the sale or lease of these lands to the public. No additional taxes will be needed. The cost of the enterprise will be \$27,000,000 and it is calculated that it will result in placing on the assessment rolls of the city property to the value of \$100,000,000.

THIS is an illustration of how such public improvements add to the value of land. Its lease rather than its sale would provide a continuing fund for the successful prosecution of the project without the issuance of bonds and without a penny of taxation. New Orleans is to be congratulated on going as far as she has. It is indicative of a growing tendency in our direction which should reassure our friends that the cause is making real progress in ways to which public attention is not sufficiently directed.

WHILE on this subject it is also interesting to note the extent to which systems of land tenure in Europe have been changed since the war. That these changes have not taken the right direction, that they are halting and insufficient, is true, but they are nevertheless very significant as indicating an awakening sense of the importance of the land question. Here are a few examples: In Latvia the people expropriated the landlords and took over the control of all waste mineral and forest lands and divided the cultivable lands into small privately owned farms. In Czecho Slovakia in 1918 much agricultural land was expropriated and apportioned to the peasants. We know something of what happened in Denmark from the careful study of the legislation in that country printed in LAND AND FREEDOM from Grace Isabel Colbron. In

Hungary 8,000 acres of arable land have been allotted to 250,000 cultivators. In Poland public bodies were ordered to take over all uncultivated lands and dispose of them by auction or contract. In Roumania a system of limited holdings was set up. In that country, as a result of this policy, land held by large landholders fell from 20,000,000 to 5,000,000 acres, and that of small owners increased from 30,000,000 to 45,000,000 acres. Sweden has also adopted a policy of limitation of large estates. All of which involves an overturn of centuries of laws and customs.

THE National Council of Congregational Churches at Washington which was addressed by President Coolidge and continued in convention for nine days, adopted a set of resolutions which aroused some very animated and even angry debate. Some Western papers printed headlines as follows: "Congregational Church Endorses Single Tax Plan," which would be highly important if true.

BUT we have to regret that no such definite action was taken. The resolutions embody endorsements of the minimum wage, arbitration in labor disputes, and the right of workers to organize. They also declare against child labor. But the resolutions which seem to have misled some of our Western contemporaries, were the following:

"A frank abandonment of all efforts to secure income, or any reward which does not come from a real service, and the recognition that all ownership is a social trust involving Christian administration for the good of all, and that the unlimited exercise of the right of private ownership is socially undesirable." Another resolution read thus: "That the farmer shall have access to the land he works on such terms as will ensure him personal freedom and economic encouragement."

THESE resolutions sponsored by the "progressive" element of the Council called forth violent opposition. Opponents said it was a creed "inspired by Karl Marx and Henry George." One delegate called out, "Are we living in Moscow or the civilized United States?" Roger W. Babson, well known writer and statistician, commented as follows (and we commend the courage of the state ment):

"I was greatly disturbed by an earlier speaker who said that if we adopted this creed we would offend some manufacturers and lose some funds," he said.