

The California Campaign

LETTER READ AT HENRY GEORGE CONGRESS

IT was suggested to me some time ago that I should take part in a discussion at the Henry George Congress as to the practical ways of advancing the reform to which we are devoted. For various reasons it is impossible for me, as I have heretofore stated, to attend and take part in the deliberations. As such substitute for personal presence as it may be, I write this communication with the hope that it may be submitted to the Congress.

Let me first discuss the present situation of the largest attempt to further our general desires in the political field—the effort now going on in the State of California. The proposition which has been advanced in this State contemplates, as you know, the immediate constitutional abolition of recent sales taxes and their prohibition for the future. Further, it calls for the exemption at once of \$1,000 in assessed value of improvements on homesteads, and successively over a course of five years, the annual abolition of twenty per cent of taxation upon remaining improvements and tangible personal property. At the end of this period, for city and county purposes, and so far as the State may make a direct levy upon them, there will be no taxation whatever on improvements and tangible personal property, but all such taxation will be transferred to land values.

The importance of the proposition will be manifest when one reflects that it will affect the industrial and social life of between six and seven millions of people, and will cover a greater extent of territory if adopted than has heretofore been effected by any general measure at all similar. Furthermore, as the rate of taxation in California is high as compared with other jurisdictions where like exemptions prevail the economic effects of the adoption of the measure will be correspondingly greater. In a general way, the proposed measure, once put into play, will not go far from fifty per cent as far as needed for the complete attainment of our ideal.

The first step taken in the campaign in favor of this amendment was the unanimous adoption in September, 1933, by the California State Federation of Labor of a resolution furthering the plan. This was followed by its endorsement by the Single Taxers of Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco; then later by the approval by the Attorney General of a suitable title to be used in placing the proposition upon petitions for a statewide initiative.

A large number of people in Single Tax organizations and trade unions, as well as paid canvassers, worked to secure the number necessary to place the proposition upon the ballot this fall, the number being 110,911, and the time limit for this year being August 7. As it was, we fell short of the number by 1,599. Since August we have added enough verified signatures to give us 2,625 overplus. The result is that while the proposition will not be voted upon this fall, under the California constitution it will go before the voters at the latest two years from now, or before, if the Governor shall so designate, at a special election. We have therefore a period of education in the State which may run from six months to two years.

It is impossible to give credit to all persons concerned in bringing about this result, but particularly I am justified in mentioning the labors of George M. Patterson of Los Angeles, E. M. Stangland of San Diego, J. W. Southwick of Stockton and S. Edward Williams of San Francisco, who have given unstintingly of their time and energy.

At the present time we are making such effort as seems possible in the way of letter-writing and speaking before organizations in order to further the success of the movement. We have, however, spent very appreciable sums in the gathering together of the names referred to, and are now practically entirely without means.

Laying aside for the time being the matter of furthering the campaign, I may say that in the newspapers of California our principles are becoming the subject of discussion. In the political field we may believe that we have helped in the making of real progress. For the first time in the history of major political parties of this country,

the State Democratic platform recognizes the existence of a land question to be dealt with through taxation. Despite association with other planks sometimes somewhat incongruous and vague, the Democratic Convention at Sacramento ten days ago accepted without question the following statement:

"Large land holdings held out of use for speculative purposes constitute a means of exploitation of an increasing population and of future generations. Such holdings should be made to yield a fair tax to the State. Also our natural resources of wealth, which have heretofore escaped their just proportion of taxation, must be recognized as natural sources of State revenue and to be made to bear their just proportion of taxes for that purpose."

Our campaign may well have had its influence in bringing about the insertion of this particular plank, the more so as Upton Sinclair and Sheridan Downey, the Democratic candidates for governor and lieutenant-governor respectively, and George Creel, the defeated candidate for nomination, took more or less part in the formation of the platform and were all of them approvingly cognizant of our efforts.

In a practical way, what can be done in other States? Each State presents, in my judgment, its particular problems as to action, which problem will require careful study. In some States it is relatively easy to present our ideas to the people. I pointed out, over three years ago, in *LAND AND FREEDOM*, that the two choice States for this purpose were Massachusetts and Michigan, and after them, California. The reason then given for their designation holds good today. In those States, resort to the initiative is relatively easy. In addition their situation as to density of population makes the problem of campaigning simple, and their large manufacturing populations offer possibilities of sympathetic appeal.

It will occur to many, and with apparent force, that progress in particular States is impossible because of the smallness of known Single Taxers and their poverty of resources. This is very true, but not as important as on the face would appear. A much more important factor is the intensity with which people believe, and the individual sacrifices they are willing to make, in order to accomplish their beliefs. In a general way I would say that twenty earnest determined and thoroughly self-sacrificing men and women can inaugurate a campaign in any except the largest States—at least where the initiative and referendum exists—and with fair prospects of success.

A trouble with the Single Taxers has been that they have not realized their own potentialities of success. They have overlooked the fact entirely that the vast majority of the voters belong to the dispossessed classes, and are ready to listen to those who can point out to them how they can come into their own. Let me illustrate the point by the ease and readiness with which all labor organizations have welcomed our proposition, from the time when the Central Labor Union of New York named Henry George as a candidate for Mayor forty-seven years ago, down to the last local or Central Labor Union which has unanimously endorsed our proposition in the State of California.

Of course, we must not make the mistake of expecting too much from labor unions—a mistake which many of our brethren make when they reproach them for want of action. The labor unions, as bodies, stand ready to give the backing of their moral influence and their votes at the polls, certainly to the extent of nine-tenths of the numbers. Except as individuals may act, they will not in any considerable degree give money or systematic labor. This condition extends, I am sorry to say, not alone to the trade unions, but to the regular bodies of avowed believers in the Single Tax. They accept their doctrine in a casual way, without being disposed to sacrifice money or time in any unusual degree to advance their cause. I do not wish to say this in any censorious or captious fashion; it is probably the usual condition of affairs that few people feel deeply any call to which they profess allegiance. If this is true as to churches—a

we know it is—we need not expect anything else from those who advocate an unusual doctrine.

Purely therefore by way of illustration, and not by way of censure, I may say that not twenty people in the United States, outside of California, have given any visible signs of interest in our California contest, and by this I mean contributing money, or expressions of sympathy, or offers of help. As a matter of fact, it may well be the case that the first fervors of adhesion to the cause have been burned out in the passage of years. Among those who forty years ago were concerned in the Delaware fight and who still remain alive, we in California have heard from but one.

Referring, however, to what I was saying shortly above, when the test comes the Single Taxer who is honest with himself will have to confess that he has little more ground of complaint to the action of trade unions than he has to the usual action of those who, being better informed, should be more in earnest. May I give a quotation I heard when a boy, made by Tom Hughes, the author of "Tom Brown of Rugby," "Woe to the faint heart or the feeble knees of the man who looketh two ways."

I am sometimes reminded of the scriptural paragraph which tells of a certain man who made a great supper and bade many, and they all with one consent began to make excuses: "I have bought a piece of ground and I must go and see it." "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them;" "I have married a wife and therefore cannot come." Now some may say, "You have striven to do too much at a time," or "too little;" or, "I would have phrased the matter differently;" or, "Fifteen years ago we disagreed about something;" or "It is useless and ridiculous to think that we can succeed against exceeding odds, and any money we give will be thrown away;" or—but the excuses for not working are innumerable.

They are also, I regret to say, those who will appeal to a slogan,—Do not follow the step-by-step method." To them I have only to say that if our principles are as fundamental as we believe them to be, there are but two methods of bringing them into play; one is, step-by-step—here a little and there a little; and the other is revolution. The latter none of us want, and when we speak of the former, let us not overlook the fact that only step-by-step do we progress along the street to our given aim, or learn a language, or acquire a profession, or accomplish any reform that is at all worth while—a comparatively recent illustration being Woman's Suffrage. In fact, the step proposed is, as I have before indicated, a very long one.

If we are to accomplish our reform which is of a political nature, it must be done through using the instrumentalities of politics, and this sooner or later. For my part, I believe that we have delayed much longer than is necessary, meanwhile erring through presenting preconceived measures in some cases, and in others through attempting the formation of an independent political party. It is not my purpose, however, to pursue this line of thought, but to call attention to another essential thing.

We have held up the Single Tax to view from every point and in every colored light. We have dissected it to the bone. We have thought that none who did not do the same could be among the elect. And we have to no small extent forgotten that this country does not operate in an atmosphere of superculture, but it is a democracy and largely ruled by the feelings and intelligence of what we call the common man. Therefore, it could not be necessary that the progress of the Single Tax should be halted until the last man in the country has taught nuances familiar to us.

Let us remember that the appeal to the man in the street can be made in simple and understandable language. He will readily understand that there are but two sorts of values—those created by the individual and those created by the community; that in the name of justice no part of the first values can be taken by the State and in the same name as much as the State needs may be taken of the value the community has originated. This simple lesson can be mastered by the most uncultured, and he can be made to realize that certainly the most of the evils of society proceed from its non-recognition.

Approaching the problem from the point of view just advanced, it will be the fortune of any speaker to make converts of the majority of any meeting he may address, the hearers not finding their benefits in land speculation. Our political advancement may not need to be halted any longer on any idea that dilettante discussions are necessary to precede it and convince the majority before we join battle.

Remember that the vast majority of men are not interested in theoretical discussions relating to some unknown time in the future. They are interested in what may happen in the immediate present.

Meanwhile we may take such solace as we can in the fact that Henry George said of the truth, "It will find friends—those who will battle for it; suffer for it; if need be, die for it. This is the power of truth."

We of California have exhausted ourselves in getting the measure upon the ballot. For the making of the campaign the next six months or two years, as the case may be, we have scarcely any funds. We feel we have a right to ask those of kindred belief throughout the country to help us, for in helping us they will be helping themselves. We therefore with confidence appeal to the Single Taxers of this country to give of their means, even until it hurts, to help on a campaign the labors of which we stand ready to undertake.

Palo Alto, Calif.

JACKSON H. RALSTON.

Resolutions Adopted by Henry George Congress

IN SUPPORT OF THE HENRY GEORGE SCHOOL

Whereas, it appears to this Congress that the grievous social and economic ills of our country at this time, as in the past, and the recurrence of periods that impose vast suffering and misery upon the American people through recurrent business depressions and unemployment, are the result of causes first clearly delineated more than fifty years ago by Henry George in his great book "Progress and Poverty," and

Whereas, it is a fact becoming more widely recognized that Henry George's delineation of these causes, and his proposals for their removal constitute a convincing and unanswerable revelation of economic truth, and,

Whereas, it seems to us that the absence of a more general recognition of the root causes of business depressions and unemployment in a land of plenty and a failure to apply the simple but certain remedies proposed by Henry George, is the greatest tragedy of political life in these days, therefore be it

Resolved, that it is our deliberate judgment that the most vital public need of our times is the work of sound economic education, according to Henry George, and further

Resolved, that we commend the movement already formed in New York for the extension throughout the land of the Henry George Fellowship, an educational fraternity, having no political aims, but aiming solely at uniting men and women everywhere in a comradeship devoted to spreading the knowledge of the vital significance to human welfare of the philosophy and economic teachings of Henry George, and further,

Resolved, that we heartily endorse the programme sponsored by the founders of the Fellowship to extend its educational work throughout the United States by the organization of groups in all population centers in the country who will apply the teaching methods that have proven so effective in the Henry George School of Social Science, in sending out into the world earnest men and women equipped for leadership in good citizenship by a sound education in fundamental economics.

THE ROOSEVELT PROGRAMME AND CALIFORNIA CAMPAIGN

Resolved, that the Henry George Congress regards as ethically and economically unsound those policies of the Federal Government aimed at the curtailment or destruction of the products of the farm or other forms of wealth; and further