

INTRODUCTION

THE PHILOSOPHY OF FREEDOM

The movement whose modern impulse dates from the publication of *Progress and Poverty* in 1879 has now grown to formidable proportions. This does not mean that there are not many thousands to whom the name of Henry George or the Single Tax is wholly unfamiliar. It does not even mean that to a majority of the people of the United States the philosophy which has become the breath of intellectual life to so many, is anything more than a name. But it does mean that what Matthew Arnold called "the saving remnant" of the people have embraced in whole or in part the truth which Single Taxers contend for, and that it is to be regarded with respect and consideration in determining their attitude toward political and economic problems as they arise. By that mysterious influence which determines the circulation of great ideas among men whose minds undergo what for want of a better term we may call "saturation," the Single Tax is today a very real and growing power in the world.

This is shown in many ways: in the changed attitude of public officials toward the movement itself; in the recommendations of State tax commissions and the luminous revelations of many of the reports of independent tax commissions; in the hospitable reception accorded to our doctrines by farmers' organizations, State and national granges, and, perhaps more significant than all, by the organized socialists, notably those of Western states, as Texas and California.

What this testifies to is not that all the world is coming to our belief, but that public opinion is being "mobilized;" that instead of having to deal with unorganized and incoherent forces privilege will soon have to contend with a thoroughly equipped army

whose plan of campaign has long been mapped out, and whose massed forces have finally agreed for an advance on the enemy's *point d' appui*.

That much still remains to be done along educational lines is apparent. The realm of argument is yet full of discordance. The professorial class have numbered a great many hostile critics, but a distinct change is noticable, and the Single Tax philosophy has secured in recent years many notable adherents among the professors of political economy.

The nineteenth century closed in a series of dazzling intellectual triumphs. Steam and electricity had reached developments which opened vistas before which the imagination was able to contemplate a civilization rounded and complete. There seemed indeed no limit to the heights to which material development might not attain.

And more: as the twentieth century opened the sphere of human sympathy was widened. The sense of brotherhood assumed new meaning. At no time in the world's history, it seemed, were men and women so busy in devising ways and means of service. Unprecedented sums were expended in charity and schemes of philanthropy, in the investigation of diseases, in the amelioration of human suffering. Humanitarian ideals seemed for a time destined to complete triumph. Socialism, with its gospel of brotherhood, claimed its disciples even among those of the highest station. Men embraced it who were frankly distrustful of its practical aims. Pulpits became rostrums for men and women with dreams for social betterment. An enormous mass of books treating of social questions came from the press in a steady stream. Novels dealing with social problems and frankly critical of long existing institutions, like Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, and *No. 5 John Street*, and the novels of John Galsworthy, as well as innumerable plays based upon the conflict of capital and labor, held the public attention almost to the exclusion of topics with which drama and fiction had been hitherto chiefly concerned.

Surely a century out of which a vision of promise might have been prefigured! But with 1914 the era closed in blood and

flame. Europe and America were finally engulfed in the most hideous calamity that has ever appalled the centuries. And the end is not yet.

In the variety of theories that have been ascribed as the origin of the present war, one great fact stands out. *The mass of men are disinherited from the earth.* To live at all they must ask the permission of kings and princes of privilege. In such a state of society the mere forms of democracy must remain shadowy and unsubstantial. They do not enter the life of the laws by which men are governed, but are ignored or set aside at the will or whim of those who control the government. Peoples become the easy prey of political kings and princes, to be commanded to their own destruction, or deluded by the grossest superstitions of prejudice or carefully nurtured national hatreds. Until men are really free, economically as well as politically, wars and the fears of war must continue. International conflicts are only a little more bloody and spectacular than the suppression of free life and the resultant killing of the spirit that social injustice entails.

- The importance of events that attend the present war is no greater than those that impend as consequences. Just as other great wars in history have been followed by results not foreseen, so the results of this one are certain to be in proportion to the magnitude of the conflict. To say that the world will never be the same for millions of human beings is to utter what now sounds like a commonplace.

If it is a war to make the world safe for democracy, the most vital thing that can be done is to alter the economic relations of men. We may differ as we will on the results of war, yet the effects of wars hitherto have been rather for the amalgamation than the separation of peoples. Had these amalgamations resulted in permanent economic changes for the better we might indeed have regarded more philosophically the outpourings of blood and treasure. But the retention of the same economic disorders following conclusions of peace has left in the ground the same seeds of dissolution, so that resultant political unity has actually strengthened the influences that make for national

decay. So if out of the present world war emerges the new internationalism of which so many eager spirits speak longingly and hopefully, we shall welcome it only if accompanied by the recognition of the Rights of Man—which mean the rights of the individual, not so much the rights of men or nations. And these rights—what are they? Are they not summed up in the little understood term democracy—the right of a man to himself, the right to a place on the planet, the right to person and product, the right to live, produce and trade without tribute to any man in all the earth?

There is much to hope for, but the path stretching before us is a long and tortuous one, and beset with dangers. Much is happening and much is being said and taught not a little disquieting. Here for instance is a work recently issued by the Harpers and written by Charles P. Steinmetz, *America and the New Epoch*. It calls for industrial organization after the war. The example held up to us for emulation is Germany. We must imitate the industrial organization of that country, or resign ourselves after the war to become like China a “field of influence,” to be parcelled out as the Yellow Kingdom is today. Yet Mr. Steinmetz seems to have some little doubt of the existence among us of the collectivist temperament that has made of Germany a machine without a soul. The *New York Globe* asks editorially if Edward Bellamy, “writing more than a score of years ago was a true prophet and will we have conscription for peace as well as war.” And the *Globe* seems to incline to the acceptance of some vague collectivist programme.

In the *North American Review* for April the editor, George Harvey, says: “It is time for America to awake to the importance of fulfilling more perfectly the provision of the Constitution (namely, to provide for the general welfare). The principle of *laissez faire* will no longer serve our purpose in the increasingly intense competition among nations. . . . We ought to realize the necessity of universal co-ordination between the government and private industry as the only rational and effective method of securing the industrial and commercial efficiency which will enable us successfully to defend ourselves and improve our

opportunities in the era of restored peace which will presently come to the world."

It would be a curious outcome of the present conflict if Germany defeated in the war should win in the economic field of America. And this testimony from eminent sources shows the dangers of just that kind of economic victory. For with the termination of hostilities we shall be confronted with a large standing army, always a menace to liberty. To keep this army alive the people must be fed on rumors of war and the war spirit. We shall be told of "the Japanese menace;" Mexico may serve again as "a good enough Morgan." A large navy may tempt us to a Chinese policy in the interests of American concessions which will bring us face to face with Japan. Liberties that we have yielded readily enough through patriotic devotion for a successful prosecution of the war may not be so easily recovered in the days when the war ends. We may be face to face with the gravest situation that ever confronted the Republic.

What is the most powerful influence opposed to these tendencies that will gather strength with the war's aftermath? We cannot, unfortunately, depend on the socialistic movement. There is a certain consanguinity, both philosophically and practically, between Socialism and the type of thought which lends itself, consciously or unconsciously, to those forms of governmental supervision of industry which its friends call "collectivism" and its enemies "Prussianism."

Bismarck understood the intimate kinship between fraternal collectivism and alien governmentalism. The ablest and perhaps the last imperialistic statesman of our times used socialism to build up a paternalistic government and the most monstrous military machine of all time. The dream of a more equitable distribution of wealth, not by throwing open natural opportunities to employment and trusting the natural laws of distribution, but by artificial means and devices of State regulation, was stolen by Bismarck while the friends of liberty slept—and lo, Germany became an industrial autocracy over-night. A curious metempsychosis accompanied the transformation. Democracy disappeared from the minds of all but a few—Socialism became as

autocratic as Junkerdom. Bismarck had triumphed over his enemies by swallowing his enemies whole and announcing their programme as his own. It was the most notable triumph of that rapacious combination of blood and iron that ever determined the destinies of States. The hope of democracy died in Germany the day Bismarckism was married to Marxian socialism.

In view of the fact that socialism, despite its high aims and dreams of human brotherhood, is powerless to combat this tendency, because of a curious affinity with those forces which would destroy liberty by the regulation of industry, to what influences shall we appeal? Surely we can only invoke in this extremity the philosophy which is its antithesis, the philosophy which would trust the natural law of economic freedom, which has certain well-defined notions of individual rights, of the beneficent laws of free competition under conditions where long existing institutions that make for the unequal distribution of wealth shall cease to exist. This is the philosophy which considers human values rather than the avoirdupois weight of the nation's total product, and measures efficiency in the value of the human soul to the community rather than in the material output of the human machine.

And this philosophy is that of the Single Tax. It goes deeper than methods of taxation, of land reform, or even a free earth; for it includes a complete social philosophy of the restoration of the natural order. Other problems that will arise are those of adjustments to conditions in the spirit of that philosophy.

It is a philosophy denied often enough in our American social life, and set at defiance in an infinite variety of laws which burden the statute books. But nevertheless it is not inimical to American spirit and tradition. It spoke in the teachings of Jefferson when he said: "The earth belongs in *usufruct* to the living and the dead have no right nor claim over it." It was the unconscious dream of those who blazed a pathway across a continent; it spoke in the rough-hewn democracy of men to whom the great West sent its call in the first half of the last century; it was written into our charter at the very birth of the Republic; it helped to mould many of our early institutions.

America is the soil where the Single Tax finds its most complete beginnings, and may yet find its great fulfillment. Henry George was born in Pennsylvania and wrote in California. A score of years after his death California cast a quarter of a million votes for the principle he died for and Pennsylvania passed laws for two of its cities, Pittsburg and Scranton, that bring his great ideal measurably nearer.

And the movement must gain strength with the years. Civilization can be saved only through freedom—political and economic—and the first without the second cannot long endure. It is this that makes the truth for which we contend, once sneered at and despised, so fascinating to earnest minded men who are now being attracted by its steady, imponderable march. Well informed men no longer doubt its ultimate triumph. It cannot perish from the earth save by a mighty cataclysm that would bury all the garnered knowledge of the years and all the aspiration of the ages. In the full fruition of time it will come—a free earth, free men, and free trade, and a race unshackled to grasp those mightier problems that concern themselves not with earth and time, but with eternity and the spiritual nature of man. This is the goal of freedom set for mankind when the aboriginal prototype swung his stone axe in the primeval forest. For man is more than a working, producing animal; he is an immortal soul.—EDITOR.