

## MISSOURI

In Missouri, as in Oregon, the Single Tax movement was made an issue in the general election in 1912, and was voted on and defeated at a State-wide referendum. The leaders of the Single Tax movement here, like the Oregon leaders, had foreseen that the Referendum and Initiative might be used to secure the Single Tax, and they began their fight for direct legislation as early as 1895.

No active headway was made until Dr. William Preston Hill and S. L. Moser of St. Louis got behind it. They made repeated efforts at each session of the legislature to get a constitutional amendment for the Initiative and Referendum submitted to the people. The first referendum amendment was submitted by the legislature in 1903 to be voted on at the general election in 1904, but this measure was very objectionable because of the high percentages of petitioners required to invoke its operation, 10, 15 and 20% of the voters in each congressional district being respectively required to call for a referendum on a statute, for the initiative of a statute, and for the initiative of a constitutional amendment. Because of this objection, only a moderate propaganda campaign was made for its adoption, and it was defeated by a majority of 43,540 in a total vote of 285,022.

The leaders were not disheartened, however, and continued their efforts for the submission of a reasonable amendment. Before the session of 1907 convened, a majority of the members of each branch of the legislature was pledged to the submission of an amendment with minimum requirements as to the percentages of voters necessary to invoke its operation, and such amendment was submitted to the voters at the general election in 1908, when it was adopted by a majority of 30,325 in a total vote of 324,905.

The legislature of 1907 also submitted a constitutional amendment providing for the separation of the sources of State and local revenues, and for local option and home rule in the selection of

the subjects of taxation. This amendment was prepared by the members of the State Tax Commissions of 1901 and 1906, and provided for the total or partial exemption of any class of property in the local taxing districts, but only after a majority vote in favor of such exemptions. The Committee on Constitutional Amendments, to which this measure was referred, eliminated the provision for voting on exemptions in local districts and delegated the power of making exemptions to county courts and municipal assemblies, contrary to enlightened public opinion, hence it was defeated in 1908 by a majority of 38,826 in a total vote of 306,190.

Members of the two State Tax Commissions of 1901 and 1906 renewed their efforts to have the Legislature of 1909 submit another amendment on local option lines, but the Legislature declined to submit it because a similar measure was defeated in 1908.

Early in 1910 representatives of the League of Missouri municipalities and of many civic and commercial organizations and leading Single Taxers met in a State convention in Sedalia in March to draft a Constitutional Amendment in favor of local option and Home Rule in taxation to be submitted by petition at the following November election. The Sedalia Conference adjourned to meet in Kansas City about two months later, when an amendment was agreed to, but it was not submitted at the November election because of lack of time to complete the petition.

A State-wide organization under the name of the Equitable Taxation League was formed in 1911 with Dr. Hill as President and S. L. Moser as Secretary. This organization included among its members prominent men in all walks of life, and was supported by many civic, economic, labor and business organizations throughout the State.

About \$20,000 was raised for the campaign of 1911-12, something more than half of which was furnished by the Fels Fund.<sup>1</sup>

The measure submitted in 1912 proposed a gradual approach to the Single Tax, provided for the exemption of Missouri's city and

<sup>1</sup> See Index for Fels Fund.

State bonds, the exemptions of personal property from local and State taxation, and the exemption of homesteads to the extent of \$3,000 and the abolition of poll taxes. It provided that land, including franchises and public service utilities, should never be exempt from taxation.

The Single Taxers of Missouri tried to keep in the background the discussion of the full Single Tax, contenting themselves with the advocacy of the measure as submitted. But the opponents of the measure at once organized an Anti-Single Tax League and a Landowner's Protective Association, with the result that the debate over the measure resolved itself into a campaign of Single Tax and anti-Single Tax without much regard to the amendment itself.

Prof. Allyn A. Young, then of the Washington University, St. Louis, writing in the *American Economic Review*, for March, 1913, said:

"It is unfortunate that much of the active work against the proposed change was done by men who were willing to defend the worst features of Missouri's present system, and who were willing to appeal to the crudest prejudices in order to gain votes."

The farmers of Missouri were the chief opponents of the measure and raised about \$50,000 to defeat it. They had been taught to believe that the effect of the measure would be to lighten the taxes of the rich men of the cities, and to add to the farmers' burden. They accepted the wildest claims of the opponents of the measure as to the ruin that impended should the amendment become law. In many places they were wrought up to a pitch of fury, and threats of personal violence to be visited upon the Single Tax speakers, and the necessity of resisting by force, were not uncommon. That the measure was after all a rather moderate one, that whole Canadian provinces and many Canadian cities had adopted more sweeping measures in the same direction, that such measures had the support of the most influential farmers' organizations in Canada, counted for nothing. Reason for a time had deserted the farmers of Missouri. It was a discreditable exhibition and one not likely to be repeated. It is safe to say that great numbers of Missouri farmers are today heartily

ashamed of the part they played in the Single Tax campaign of 1912. It is certain that they can never again be persuaded to re-enact the hysterical and panicky opposition of that year.

The defeat of the Single Tax measure was decisive, being 87,000 in favor to 508,000 opposed. It is a curious example of the state of unreason that prevailed that the measure coupled with it, which provided for a permanent State Tax Commission such as nearly every other State possesses, shared the fate of the Single Tax amendment, "the embattled farmers evidently suspecting an insidious attempt to smuggle in the Single Tax."<sup>1</sup>

In 1914 the enemies of the Single Tax sought to amend the Constitution with a view of preventing the use of the Initiative and Referendum for the S. T. This was known as "the Anti-Single Tax amendment," and it was creditable to the awakened good sense of the voters of Missouri that it was decisively beaten by a vote of 138,000 in favor to 334,000 opposed.—EDITOR.

<sup>1</sup>*History of the Single Tax Movement*, by Arthur N. Young, page 196.