

## NATIONAL SINGLE TAX CONFERENCES

In September, 1890, was convened in New York City, in historic Cooper Union, the first National Conference of Single Taxers.<sup>1</sup> Five hundred delegates from more than thirty States met and formed a national organization known as "The Single Tax League of the United States," with a national committee composed of one member from each State, and an executive committee of which William T. Croasdale was the first chairman. Mr. Croasdale was the real organizer of this Conference.

A most pleasant duty devolved upon the members of this conference, which was the welcoming home of Henry George, now returned from a trip abroad. William T. Croasdale acted as temporary chairman and Louis F. Post, now Assistant Secretary of Labor, as permanent chairman of this Conference. Between the sessions of the Conference there were mass meetings at which inspiring addresses were made by Henry George and others. At one of these meetings characterized by great enthusiasm Mr. Hamlin Garland, then as now a novelist of note, read a poem by the late Frances M. Milne, of California, welcoming Henry George to his native land, and Mr. George spoke eloquently of the progress of the cause in Australasia, Great Britain, Canada and the United States.

Among the members of this Conference were Tom L. Johnson, later mayor of Cleveland, Judge James G. Maguire, of California, Edward Osgood Brown, later Appellate Judge in Chicago, Wm. Lloyd Garrison, of Massachusetts, son of the Liberator; Mayor Hoch, of Adrian, Michigan, Robert Baker, later Congressman from Brooklyn, and many others whose names have since become famous in Single Tax history.

The Conference adopted a platform and a number of resolutions.

<sup>1</sup>An admirable and very full account of this Conference appeared in the *Public* of Chicago, from the pen of Louis F. Post. See issue for September 1, 1911.

This platform, printed elsewhere in this volume,<sup>1</sup> remains the authoritative declaration of the principles and purposes of Single Taxers in the United States. Though the work of the Conference failed to perpetuate itself, and the organization soon gave place, officially and in effectiveness, to groups of Single Taxers organized locally and in States to effect changes in legislation and administrative laws,<sup>2</sup> the gathering was no doubt of great influence at the time in giving impetus to the educational movement which, inaugurated in the mayoralty campaign of 1886, has continued down to the present day with increasing force and almost without interruption.

Single Taxers hitherto have not taken kindly to organization. The very nature of the movement, calling in its practical application for local or State action, and depending for its political success on situations that arise from time to time without warning, seems to militate against any but the very loosest kind of co-ordination. And such organizations as may be effective for the accomplishment of some one step in the progress of the movement must be changed in form to meet the next exigency that may arise. Were Single Taxers a political party the case would be different in fact and would call with greater urgency for closer organization. Whether their effectiveness for propoganda would be increased in that way is a disputed question. Advocates of independent party action lay great stress upon the value of the party method considered from the view-point of popular education. Into this question, which has been one of not unfriendly controversy, it is no part of this work to enter.

The Second National Single Tax Conference was held in Chicago in 1893. The attendance was much smaller than at the first Conference, thus confirming Henry George in his impressions of the doubtful value of the League, whose influence had failed to fulfill the expectations of its usefulness. The Conference was enthusiastic, but the small attendance ended for a number of years all attempts to weld Single Taxers into a national organization, as well as all attempts to call Single Taxers together nationally.

<sup>1</sup>See Appendix for "Platform."

<sup>2</sup>See Index for California, Colorado, Oregon, Rhode Island, etc.

This Conference was important as marking the division between the "socialistic" and "individualistic" Single Taxers, and in the modification of the final plank of the platform relating to public utilities adopted at the first Conference.<sup>1</sup>

On November 18, 1907, there was a National Single Tax Conference which met in New York City. Here for the first time in 14 years Single Taxers of the nation gathered. Though there were delegates from California, Florida, Ohio, Illinois, Alabama, Maryland, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Washington, D. C. and Canada, it cannot be said that in numbers the Conference was representative of the cause, which by this time had struggled to a point if not of popular support to a far wider recognition of the importance of its aims than at any previous time in its history.

The American Single Tax League was organized at this conference with Mr. Bolton Hall as president and Hon. John J. Murphy as general secretary, and for a year or two the League with headquarters in New York did effective work, but soon ceased from its activities.<sup>2</sup>

Under the auspices of the Joseph Fels Fund of America founded in 1909<sup>3</sup> a number of National Single Tax conferences have been held. The first of these was convened in New York City, with Hon. Robert Baker, former Congressman from Brooklyn, as chairman. Both Joseph Fels and Hon. Tom L. Johnson<sup>4</sup> (deceased) were present.

While the Conference was in session the news of the death of Count Leo Tolstoi arrived, and the following resolutions were offered by Joseph Dana Miller and adopted by a rising vote:

"Whereas, The news has arrived this morning of the death of Count Leo Tolstoi, we, the Single Taxers of America, send our sympathetic greeting to Countess Tolstoi; and

"Whereas, This foremost man of the world, whose teachings have made him famous in all lands, has repeatedly announced his

<sup>1</sup>See Appendix for Platform.

<sup>2</sup>For report of the Conference of 1907 see *Single Tax Review* of January-February 1908.

<sup>3</sup>See Index for "Organizations."

<sup>4</sup>See Appendix for biographical sketch of Tom L. Johnson.

belief in the doctrines of Henry George, for which we stand, and which we are engaged in popularizing in the United States; therefore, be it

“Resolved, That we deeply deplore the death of the Russian prophet and express our hope that the endorsement by this man, on whose soul rested so much of

‘The burden and the mystery  
Of all this unintelligible world,’

of those doctrines to which we are pledged, and his statement that he regarded Henry George as the greatest of Americans, may be the means of drawing attention to the plan of industrial emancipation to which he lent the weight of his splendid name.”

Mr. Henry George, Jr., seconding the resolutions, spoke in part as follows:

“Within the last few hours the greatest spirit in the world has passed—the spirit of a man who looked into the eyes of death calmly, fearlessly, with the confidence of a child. Old in the experiences of the world, born into great riches and station, and given to all the luxuries and dissipations of his class, of which he reserved nothing in his confessions, he was born again into the simpler physical and a new spiritual life. A great man; great in every sense of greatness; a man who left the court of princes to follow the man born in the manger.

“To me it was one of the great events of my life to have spent a few hours under his roof, and now his death is a new inspiration. For now all the contradictory things, the things not understandable, will fall away and the majesty of this prophet of brotherhood and justice will shine out. Great is Tolstoi, greater the truth he taught, and greater still will both become as the centuries roll on.”

The Second Annual Conference of Single Taxers under the Joseph Fels Fund Commission auspices was held in Chicago on November 24, 25 and 26, 1911. Mr. W. H. Holly, of Chicago, was elected chairman and Messrs. Stanley Bowmar and Luther S. Dickey, both of Chicago, were elected secretaries. This Conference was memorable in many ways, but chiefly for the presence and speech at the banquet of Mrs. Susan Look Avery, then in her 94th year, and since deceased. Mr. Marion Reedy, of St. Louis, was toastmaster.

The Third Annual Fels Commission and Single Tax Conference was held in Boston on Nov. 28, 29, 30, 1912. Mr. Louis F. Post was elected chairman. Mr. Hull, of Cambridge, Mass., was elected secretary. At the banquet on the evening of the 30th, Hon. John J. Murphy was toastmaster.

The Fourth Annual Conference under the same auspices was held at Washington, D. C., on January 15, 16, and 17, 1914. Mrs. Post was elected chairman of the Conference, and Stanley Bowmar secretary. This was the last Conference at which Joseph Fels appeared, his death occurring soon after. It was at this Conference that Hon. Newton D. Baker, of Cleveland, now Secretary of War, avowed himself a firm Single Taxer, hoping that he might some day see with the vision of his master, Tom L. Johnson. He spoke of Johnson as the man who had moulded his ideas and guided his work.

The Fifth Annual Conference to be held under the same auspices took place at San Francisco on August 23, 24, and 25, 1915. Mrs. Alice Thacher Post was elected chairman and Clarence E. Todd and Stanley Bowmar secretaries.

The Sixth and last Conference to be held under the auspices of the Fels Fund Commission took place at Niagara, N. Y. on August 19, 20, and 21, 1916. Mrs. Alice Thacher Post was elected chairman and Stanley Bowmar secretary. At this Conference the Fels Commission ceased to exist and in its stead arose the American Section of the Joseph Fels Fund International Commission, to be selected by Mrs. Fels, to act in cooperation with a national organization formed in accordance with the wishes of a conference to be called at an early date.

Single Tax women of the United States have held separate conventions at various times in different cities. Many of these have been fairly representative in attendance. The Women's National Single Tax League has included among its official heads such well known women in the movement as Mrs. John S. Crosby, Mrs. Jane Dearborn Mills, Dr. Mary D. Hussey, Mrs. Minnie Rogers Ryan and many others.—EDITOR.