

OREGON

In this article I shall deal with the Single Tax movement in Oregon only from the time it was introduced into practical politics, which was in 1908, when H. D. Wagnon, A. D. Cridge and others prepared and proposed a constitutional amendment, exempting from taxes all manufacturing machinery and household furniture, and some other personal property in actual use. Joseph Fels contributed largely to the money expended in this campaign. This measure was advocated and opposed as a step toward the Henry George Single Tax. The vote was about two to one against it after a fairly active campaign in which there was very little bitterness. The total vote on the measure was nearly 90,000.

In 1910 the Single Taxers in and out of organized labor presented, by initiative petition, a "county home rule" constitutional amendment allowing each county to exempt any class or classes of property from taxes, and abolishing the poll and head taxes for the State. It was adopted by about 2,000 majority with a vote of about 90,000. Its success was probably due to the belief of the people generally that it increased their power, and also to the abolition of the odious poll tax. At that time there was no very great or general fear that the Single Tax would follow in counties as the result of the people having the power to vote upon the question.

This campaign was financed wholly by the Joseph Fels Fund Commission. But the Commission did much more than support the County Home Rule Tax Amendment. The campaign was complicated by a bitter attack on the Oregon system of popular government. All the powers that prey were united to destroy the system by indirect attack. Without the literature supplied to every voter in the State, at the expense of the Joseph Fels Fund Commission, there is no doubt the reactionaries and standpatters would have won control of the State government. They would then have

placed such restrictions on the use of the initiative and referendum, and so amended the direct primary law, as to have practically restored the old system before the general election of 1912. Instead of that, with the help of the Fels Fund, the progressives not only defeated this attack, but also secured the adoption of the first Presidential Primary Law, which was quickly imitated by so many other States that Wilson's nomination and election over Taft was made possible. No one man contributed more to the success of the 1910 campaign than Dr. W. G. Eggleston. His writings were a very large factor in saving the system of popular government in Oregon.

For the campaign of 1912, the Single Taxers proposed by initiative petition the Graduated Single Tax Constitutional Amendment. The adoption of this measure would have broken up all the great landed estates and exempted all personal property and land improvements from taxes in Oregon. This campaign was one of the most violent and bitter in the history of Oregon politics. No other campaign in Oregon, not excepting the campaigns for Prohibition and Woman Suffrage, has ever aroused so much bitterness, misrepresentation and falsehood. This amendment was lost by a vote of practically 8 to 3 in a total of about 112,000 votes on the question.

At the same election County Single Tax Exemption measures were submitted in the counties of Multnomah, Clackamas and Coos. They were all lost, though in Coos County by a very small majority. In the general stampede against anything that looked like the Single Tax, the County Home Rule Tax Amendment that had been adopted in 1910 was repealed in 1912, though not by a large majority.

In the campaigns of 1910 and 1912, the Fels Fund Commission spent more than \$60,000 in Oregon.

In 1914 the Single Taxers proposed the Fifteen Hundred Dollar Homes Tax Exemption Amendment, supported on the ballot by A. D. Cridge, G. M. Orton, Will Daly, H. D. Wagnon and W. S. U'Ren. This measure proposed to exempt for each taxpayer \$1500 of the assessed value of his live stock, implements, machinery, merchandise, dwelling house and other buildings, fences,

orchards, vines and other land improvements. It was intended especially as an exemption measure for the benefit of the small home owners and the small farmers. This was rejected by a majority of substantially 2 to 1 in a vote of more than 200,000 on the measure. The women voted for the first time at a regular general election. The campaign for this measure was paid for wholly by the Single Taxers of Oregon.

For whatever of blundering there may have been in the campaigns of 1910, 1912 and 1914, the writer accepts full responsibility. He was given practical control of the funds and of the conduct and management of all three campaigns. Joseph Fels, Daniel Kiefer, and Bolton Hall, of the Fels Fund Commission; and C. E. S. Wood and H. W. Stone of Oregon, were consistently of the opinion from the beginning and through to the end that the exemption method was a mistake. They held that we should do better and make more rapid progress towards our goal, presenting the full Single Tax philosophy as proposed by Henry George in *Progress and Poverty*, than by any effort for exemptions of any kind, or for the limited Single Tax as proposed by Thomas G. Shearman, no matter in what form the idea might be presented. There were others in Oregon who agreed with them part of the time, and many contributors to the Fels Fund who agreed with them all the time, but the overwhelming majority of the more or less active Single Taxers seemed to believe in and advocated the step by step method.

Apparently the majority in other States still believe in the step by step plan of partial exemption, either for the State at large or for local home rule. But here in Oregon it may be safely said we have learned our lesson. Looking back over the past eight years it seems that many of us have been very stupid and slow to acquire what the Methodists call "a saving conviction" that the Single Tax is essentially and fundamentally a great moral issue. It is not a mere fiscal question of whether taxes shall be paid on one or another kind of property, or whether any class of property owners will pay more or less under one plan than the other.

After our four campaigns here for step by step measures, experience is all we are sure we have. We think we have quite a

stock of favorable sentiment accumulated among the voters that will bring them over later with a rush, but the wish may be father to the thought. The young men do not flock to the exemption standard. The hope of saving a few dollars never inspired the search for the Holy Grail. The Sir Galahads do not willingly and knowingly spend their lives saving mere dollars for other men; and the Sir Galahad kind of people are the kind of people who must make the Single Tax a part of the economic system of the world. At no time during our campaign has there been anything like the enthusiasm of the Anti-Poverty Society before the invention of the limited Single Tax.

Judging from the results obtained in British Columbia and other places north of the line, most of us do not believe a mere exemption measure is worth a fight, even if we could be sure of its adoption. The chief result in the British Provinces now seems to have been a boom in land speculation and necessarily higher prices for land. A promise of the same result as to prices was made in the Pueblo campaign, and yet that is not what Single Taxers want or are working for.

We have learned from costly experience in Oregon that Single Taxers must offer a measure which puts our enemies on the defensive. As to mere exemption laws, our foes take the offensive and we are on the defensive. Advocates of a reform worth living for must not occupy the position of explainers and defenders. The explainer and defender in politics is ever a loser. The Single Taxers in and out of organized labor in Oregon are now going after public ownership of all the land rent, both actual or potential. Their measure will break land speculation as soon as it is adopted and will hinder speculation as soon as it receives a fair vote.

We are going out for an economic system in which every man can always make and own his job. With that opportunity ever open, would-be bosses and employers would be ever soliciting the laborer's services, and the laborer himself would pick and choose, instead of being the cheapest of living creatures.

We know from costly experience that the full strength of the moral reason and argument for the Single Tax on land rent can-

not be offered for anything less than a demand for its full application. The land rent lords and speculators can present the full strength of their defence, and with all its prejudices, against any mere exemption or site value tax measure for revenue only.

With us, as Single Taxers, revenue is a wholly secondary consideration. Revenue, and more revenue, can be had from a hundred different sources. We want the use of the earth to be free for the sons of men.

We shall never begin to get anything worth while until we tell the people what we want, and all we want, by presenting a full Single Tax measure so far as it is possible to apply the principle under State laws and constitutions. In that day, and in that way, only, we shall prove we have the courage of our convictions.—
W. S. U'R.