

## THE FARMER AND THE SINGLE TAX

The remarkable extent to which the taxation of land values is being endorsed by leading farm organizations is attracting nationwide attention. By land speculators, holders of large landed estates, and monopoly interests generally, this is viewed with alarm, but to the followers of Henry George it is tremendously hopeful in the possibilities it opens up for an early triumph of the Single Tax. This advanced stand of the leading farm organizations has been brought about by educational work in the farm field almost wholly outside and independent of the organized Single Tax movement, and it is important to the earnest Single Tax propagandist to get a right understanding of this farmer movement and of how it can be effectively aided and accelerated.

The extent to which the organized farmers' movement of the country has endorsed the principles for which Single Taxers contend is scarcely realized. In June, 1915, the Washington State Grange passed the following resolution:

"Resolved, by Washington State Grange, that this body go on record as favoring the adoption of a system of taxation whereby personal property and all improvements would be exempt from taxation and the burden of taxation be borne by land values only."

The Maryland State Grange met in convention at Easton, in December, 1915. At the conclusion of the report of the special committee appointed at the 1915 Convention to investigate the distribution of the burden of taxation the following as expressing the views of the Committee was presented:

"Resolved, That we favor the abolition of the general property tax and favor the taxation of the value of land irrespective of improvements.

"Resolved, That we favor the taxation of all land held out of use, at its full selling or speculative value.

“Whereas, There are in the United States more than 2,225,000 tenant farmers, and the constantly increasing number bodes ill for the perpetuity of our republic; therefore be it

“Resolved, That as the remedy for this crying evil we favor the taxing of the annual rental value of land for fiscal needs of government. The effect of this would be to make it unprofitable for anyone to own more land than could be put to its best and most profitable use. This would at once enable working tenant farmers to acquire homes of their own and become independent, self-respecting citizens of the republic, and it would destroy land monopoly.”

These resolutions were debated for two hours. Finally on the plea that their purport was not sufficiently understood by the membership, a motion was made and carried that they be referred to the Subordinate Granges throughout the State for their thorough study and consideration during the year.

The Farmers National Congress at its annual convention in Indianapolis in October, 1916, adopted the following:

“Resolved, That this Congress views with alarm the increase in farm tenancy, recommends that the several States adopt a gradual land tax adapted to their peculiar conditions, in order to promote more and better farm homes, farm citizenship, and country life in general.”

The National Grange, at its Annual convention, Washington, D. C., went on record as follows:

“Resolved, That the Legislative Committee be charged with the duty of taking into consideration the whole problem of the tenant farmer in America and his relations to the economic, social, and rural future of the Republic; that we endorse the principles of the so-called Crosser bill (H. R. 11329) introduced in the last session of Congress and favorably acted upon by the committee on public lands, and which should become a law at the next session of Congress.”

At the annual convention of the National Farmers' Union, held at Palatka, Fla., the Union took advanced ground and endorsed a graduated land tax.

The Farmers' Union of North Carolina, the largest State farmers' organization in the South, ranks next to Nebraska, the

largest State organization in the National Farmers' Union. Following are excerpts from the address of State President H. Q. Alexander :

"The State should devise and adopt a progressive form of taxation. All kinds of property should not bear the same rate of taxation; property should be classified. If a man buys a farm or other piece of property and by hard work and self-denial greatly improves it, it is wrong to run up the tax on that man's industry. And perhaps nearby is another piece of property owned by a non-resident who is holding it for the advance that comes from community development; his property adds nothing to the progress of the community but it is valued at a song. This is all wrong.

"There should be a graduated land tax; the lowest rate being imposed on the smallest estates and the rates increased as the land holdings increase. Every head of a family should be exempt from all taxes on a homestead of at least \$1,000 value. In New Zealand the homestead exemption is for \$2,500 value. New Zealand is governed by farmers and has the best government in the world. The lawyer influence in New Zealand's government is nil.

"Property held out of use for speculation should be taxed higher than property that is being used for the benefit and improvement of the community. People living in towns and investing in country property should be required to pay an absentee landlord tax; but they should have the benefit of the homestead exemption."

The Farmers' Non-Partisan League of North Dakota, which elected a Single Taxer Governor of the State and the entire State ticket with one exception, had a strong land value tax in its platform. The leading field lecturer of the organization is Ray McKaig, Master of the State Grange and Secretary of the Republican State Central Committee. Since the election he has been delivering addresses to great gatherings of farmers in all the North Western States. In all these addresses and in the interviews with him published in the papers of all the cities visited by him he tells of the stand of the Farmer of North Dakota for the taxation of land values. We quote from the most widely published of these addresses:

"Speculators hold immense tracts of undeveloped lands in our State and refuse to sell until they get a high price, thus re-

tarding the development of our counties. They are waiting for the farmers to build more buildings to improve their farms, then, when the price of all the land goes up, the speculator, in time, will unload. The farmer in the meantime, pays taxes on the very improvements, such as buildings, etc., that help raise the price of the speculators' land. Canada does not tax the farmers' improvements in British Columbia but puts an equal tax on all farm land, whether improved or not. Thus the speculators in Canada pay as much taxes for unimproved acreage as farmers do in North Dakota for improved farms. What is good for Canada is good for North Dakota—sauce for the goose, etc.”

The farmers of Texas have authorized the circulation of the following petition:

“Taxation shall be equal and uniform, as to property subject to taxation. Provided, however, that all forms of property which shall have been created by the labor of human beings shall forever be exempted from taxation, and that the State and all political subdivisions thereof, generally known as counties, cities and towns shall assess for taxation only the rental of the unimproved value of the land, irrespective of the improvements thereon, and the value of the franchise of public service corporations that use the streets or lands of the State or any political subdivisions of same, and shall be empowered to fix such a rate as to produce the revenue necessary to defray the expenses of the government, economically administered, in said State or political subdivision of same.”

The petition makes the further statement:

“Texas has 170,000,000 acres of land; 27,000,000 acres are improved; three-fourths of these improved acres are either rented or mortgaged. Out of the balance there are over 100,000,000 acres suitable for cultivation—all held by speculators, and the people are suffering for the scarcity of products, and high cost of living and ever-increasing land prices and rentals.

“So we have four-fifths of the State locked up in the hands of the speculators while tenantry has increased 129 per cent. in the last 20 years.”

It is self-evident to the Single Taxer that the farmers need the Single Tax; that there is no possible way except through the adoption of the Single Tax to prevent the robbery of the farmer,

which takes even from the most prosperous a large part of his just profits, and which steadily reduces increasing numbers to the condition of struggling poverty-stricken tenants, or, what is essentially the same thing, mortgage burdened owners whose equity in their farms is steadily becoming a minus quantity. It is also self-evident that the Single Tax, which strikes at the very foundation of special privilege, cannot be enacted into law except by the aid of the farmer. The farmers are so dominating a factor in the electorate that any law, federal or State, which they unitedly oppose has no possible show of enactment, while on the other hand there is no way to prevent the speedy enactment of any measure which has the united farmers behind it.

It is not in Delaware, or in Rhode Island, or in Missouri, or even in California, that the wonderful progress of the Single Tax in the farm world is found. While it is the most marked in Washington, where the great State farmers organization has endorsed the Single Tax, and in North Dakota where the now famous Farmers' Non-partisan League has made the taxation of land values one of the leading planks in its platform, it is a general nation-wide movement profoundly influencing the thoughts of farmers and organized farmer activities in every State in the Union. The favorable attitude of the Farmers' National Congress; of the Farmers' Educational and Co-operative Union of America, with organizations in twenty-two States; of the Grange, the great farmer organization of the North, with 33 State organizations, over 20,000 locals, and a million members; and of other farm organizations; the increasing editorial endorsement of the taxation of land values and straight Single Tax in the leading farm papers; the increasing extent to which the Single Tax is being made a subject of study in the Grange and Farmers' Union lecture courses; the increasing call from farmers themselves for Single Tax lecturers; and the increasing extent to which the taxation of land values is being included in the combined working programmes of labor and farm organizations; all show how wide spread and significant this movement is. That it rests on a solid foundation is shown by the economic soundness of the positions taken by these farm organizations

on the related subjects of the tariff, transportation, finance, etc.

This remarkable progress of the Single Tax in the farm field is due to the inherent democracy of the farmer himself; to the unswerving loyalty of some of the organization leaders to the farmer's cause, and to a few Single Taxers, who having made a broad sympathetic study of the farmer's problems, as the farmer himself saw them, identified themselves with the farmers' cause and became active workers in the farm organizations, editors of farm papers, teachers in agricultural schools and colleges, etc.

The farmer, the man nearest to nature, and furthest removed from the artificialities of modern society, is, at one and the same time, the most stable conservative and natural democrat. The mere surface investigator or observer, and the Single Taxer impatient to find a short-cut to the Single Tax, may dispute this, but their reasoning is on a par with that of many well meaning opponents of the Single Tax. The farm organizations are among the most democratic organizations in the country, and the Grange beneath a cloak of ritualistic forms and ceremonies, and a superstructure of an undemocratic national organization, is one of the most, if not the most, genuinely democratic institutions in the world. I know that some good workers in the farm field dispute this, but I think they only see the farmer individually, or locally, and have failed to see him as a whole. The farmer is distinguished by certain dominating characteristics as a class. It is these dominating class characteristics that must be appealed to in order to win his support and incite him to action. It is the collective effect of the action of the thousands and thousands of local organizations that determines the policy and action of the organization as a whole; and the collective effect of all the farm organizations is the most potent factor in determining the policy and action of the farm press, of the unorganized farmers, of the representatives of rural districts in all legislative bodies, and of the leaders of political parties. The stand of the leading farm organizations is the dominating factor in determining the action of the whole farm world.—G. P. H.