

# The Single Tax Review

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## Current Comment

A FEW days before election the *Journal of Commerce* of this city printed editorially these memorable words: "Probably the Presidential campaign of 1920 will be recorded as one of the most futile and the least decisive in American history." Who can doubt that this is so?

In the same article the paper points out that the League of Nations appealed only to the relatively intelligent section of the nation as a whole, that the many problems of prices, government industrial control, labor and cost of living were barely touched upon. The *Journal of Commerce* sagely concludes that the campaign will not end on election day.

THE most futile and least decisive election in American history." This is the shameful truth. Begun by the Democratic nominee in an attack on the Republicans for lavish expenditure of money for campaign purposes, an issue abandoned almost as soon as it was launched, it ended with the same nominee making appeals for the League of Nations—in which only about ten per cent. of the people were interested and the other ninety per cent. wholly uninformed.

BALANCING the various statements of Mr. Harding and Mr. Cox it would be easy to establish an agreement between them on the issue which many people thought the predominant one. Mr. Harding strove to get friends of the League to vote for him on the ground that he was in favor of some sort of league, and Cox, fearful that he might lose the votes of those Democrats who had no use for the League, intimated that he would confer with eminent Republicans before coming to a final decision regarding the League or a League. And so on, *ad infinitum, ad nauseam*.

IT is a favorite device of privilege to draw away the attention of the people from the wrongs under which they suffer by getting up a foreign war. In this way they are made to forget their domestic troubles. The League of Nations served the same purpose—admirably it served it. Many of our Single Taxers voted for Cox because they felt strongly on the League. We respect this conviction without sharing it. We cannot help but feel that their judgment was a sorry error. The League, admirable as it is considered as a vision, and practicable as we think it is in most of its provisions, will not prevent war because it does not remove the cause of wars. Every Single Taxer knows this. When they voted the Democratic ticket they de-

clared in effect that they regarded the League issue as the most important question. Yet privately they would not concede this. How account, therefore, for this contradiction between conviction and practice among Single Taxers in those States where they had the opportunity to vote for Macauley and Barnum?

WE imagine, after all, that it springs from the force of habit. To give a list of those issues which have engrossed the political attention and activities of Single Taxers in the last twenty years would fill this column. Many of these issues are dead and buried. But all served to obscure the real issue. The rights of man to the use of the earth were forgotten while we shouted ourselves hoarse for some candidate or some issue that served to divert our energies from the main cause—the original source of all our troubles. But, please God, no more! The new era in the Single Tax movement has begun in which the proposal will be urged as the Great Restoration. The old phrases which had almost died out will come into use again. The old call to the disinherited, which gave Henry George his marvelous power, and has been only faintly echoed down through the years since Henry George passed away, will be heard again. The Message shall not be lost, for new leaders are coming to the front and new hosts are gathering. More converts have been made and more workers enlisted this year than in the twenty years that have passed.

AS to the Single Tax vote, that appears to have been unimpressive in most places, though full details are lacking as this is written. "Side parties" appear to have fared badly. The Farmer-Labor Party has failed to live up to expectations. The Socialist Party shows signs of breaking up. Even if they have cast two million votes, this is a falling off from the vote of four years ago, allowing for the addition of women voters and the natural increase. The defeat of some of the leaders of the party is also noted as an indication of waning power. The stupendous victory of the Republican Party seems to have overwhelmed everything else. A "futile and indecisive victory" indeed. The miscellaneous hatreds directed against what was vaguely known as "Wilsonism"—in many cases passionate and unreasoning—seem to have been about the only issues in which the people were really interested and they struck out, blindly, angrily, hopelessly.

LECKY declared that if we were to judge Americans solely by the way they conduct themselves in public life, our judgments would be extremely unfortunate—and unjust. In the same way, were we to judge Americans

solely by the intellectual standards of their political leadership, our estimate of their intelligence would be a humiliating one. At a time when the country faces an industrial depression, when all signs point to hard times coming for the wage earner and business man, they accepted the leadership of two candidates, neither of whom showed the faintest comprehension of what underlies the industrial problem.

## Economic Origin of Race Prejudice

IT may lead us into a profitable train of thought to reflect that much of race prejudice has for its basis the economic condition that separates men into classes and groups. That this prejudice is often unconscious or sub-conscious, does not affect the matter. The prejudice against the Jew entertained by many, and shared often by men whom we would little suspect of harboring feelings against the race, is not distinctively a religious prejudice, since it was manifested by some of the most enlightened Romans—as, for example, Seneca and Tacitus, years before the death of Christ. In the Jewish people the Romans found themselves confronted, not with a different religious faith, for of this they were tolerant enough, but by a different body of economic teaching and different economic habits.

In more modern times the exclusion of the Jews from certain trades and professions, the ostracism which may have had its origin in the first instance in religious prejudice, was extended and strengthened by the economic division that made the Jews traders and money lenders, thus establishing classes dependent upon them. Their very unusual ability in this direction, due not at all to any affinity with these vocations, for the Jew is by tradition and taste an agriculturist, but rather to a greater natural quickness of intellect, operated to strengthen the original religious prejudice and unconsciously to assimilate it with the later-born economic group antagonism. It was now, if we may so speak, a property prejudice rather than a religious or racial one.

We are disposed to regard the antagonism of the South to the negro's exercise of political power with tolerance because of certain aspects which the economic problem has for the people of that section. The fear that the Southerner entertains in States where the blacks greatly outnumber the whites that if the negroes are allowed to exercise political power they may be despoiled of their property, seems reason enough for disfranchising the illiterate colored voter. (We need not touch upon the desire of the South to keep the races socially apart.) We cannot but believe that this fear is exaggerated, since the effect of almost all our land laws and tax laws is to despoil all our people of their property, but the fear has rational grounds nevertheless. In a country where the rights of property are meaningless terms, where the unnatural division of the landed and landless distort the perceptions, what can be expected

but unreasoning prejudices based upon property distinctions, which in this case take the form of racial distinctions?

With the recognition of the equal rights of all men, black and white, to the soil on which and from which they must live, it is not a violent or groundless hope that most of the feeling against the negro would disappear. There would be no longer the fear of invasion of any real property rights by black majorities that form the excuse, if not the justification, of negro disfranchisement in the Southern States.

## The Vote and Some Reflections Thereon

AMONG the reflections suggested by this election is that the so-called Farmer-Labor Party, which inherited the votes garnered by the Committee of 48 in a campaign of more than a year preceding the Chicago conference, cannot hope to win votes from the Socialists who will continue their adherence to the party that more nearly represents them.

Another fact that stands out is that the Socialists can never hope to become formidable rivals of the two old parties. For this there is a reason. America does not furnish an indigenous soil for the growth of Socialism. The party representing this doctrine has probably attained the apex of its achievement, and will now steadily decline. It rallied a large portion of its support in this election because of the lovable personality of Eugene V. Debs. It could not hope to do as well with a less attractive personality.

The fundamental division in economic thought, as far as men reason on the subject at all, is between those who incline to Socialism and those who incline to Individualism. Of course, the rational ground is between the extremes that meet in what for a better term we may call social individualism. The rational economic thinker is a social individualist, for the State has functions that are of its own by right. But the division between the Socialist and Individualist is convenient, for it is a sufficiently real distinction. Men will incline to one or other of these doctrines in their conviction, and the point we wish to make is that these men can be made to divide *politically* as they divide *economically*. There is no possibility of a reconciliation between them in a single political party to oppose or reform the existing order. This experiment was tried at Chicago and resulted disastrously to the experimenters.

The natural political division is the same as the economic division. The two great parties do not so divide, because each is a political anachronism, or an economic anachronism, and does not depend on the reasoning but the unreasoning prejudices of the voters—in other words, upon their delusions. It is a mark of intellectual distinction not to belong to either, for the men and women who do not so affiliate have begun to think, at least. Then there are vaster numbers only loosely affiliated. The economic convictions of the latter are latent, and when successfully appealed to they will divide politically as they divide economically—into the socialistic or individualistic camps.