

The Single Tax Review

VOL. XX

JANUARY-FEBRUARY, 1920

No. 1

Current Comment

SINGLE Taxers generally, who were supporters of the government in the crisis through which we have passed in the war with Germany, are now called upon to defend our institutions from the after-the-war heroes, and their officious meddling. The act of the New York Assembly, in defiance of those fundamental principles which form the cornerstone of American liberty, in expelling the five Socialist members duly elected by their constituencies, is typical. The country is fairly seething with the activities of the after-the-war heroes. Now that the khaki-clad boys who won the war have doffed their uniforms after bidding good-bye to many of their young comrades who sleep in the sacred soil of France, they may depart to their homes, their rights in the country they fought for quite forgotten. The parades are over, with the music and the shouting. These fine boys of ours offered the supreme sacrifice; others who were compelled to remain at home strove and struggled for the success of the cause. What was that cause? "To make the world safe for democracy." Now the boys are forgotten, and along with them the great cause for which they fought. The war is over and some of the boys are dead. Let's go to the movies.

WHAT is democracy? Can it anywhere exist where the rights of men to the soil of their country is denied? We palter and palter, yet this question is insistent. It is knocking at the door of every legislature in the land. Very timidly it knocks as yet, but it is audible. Not to answer it is to be destroyed. In one of the almost inspired passages which make Henry George immortal he said:

"Just as social adjustments promote justice, just as they acknowledge the equality of right between man and man, just as they insure to each the perfect liberty which is bounded only by the equal liberty of every other, must civilization advance. Just as they fail in this, must advancing civilization come to a halt and recede. Political economy and social science cannot teach any lessons that are not embraced in the simple truths that were taught to poor fishermen and Jewish peasants by One who eighteen hundred years ago was crucified—the simple truths which, beneath the warpings of selfishness and distortions of superstition seem to underlie every religion that has ever striven to formulate the spiritual yearnings of man."

THE other morning there crept out from New York harbor, shrouded in darkness and in mist, a vessel bearing from our shores to some undesignated port, a large number of "undesirable aliens." Among them was the volatile and rather aimless Emma Goldman, the half demented Berkman, and a number of others caught in the net spread

by the government. Doubtless they had said and threatened wild things, and unquestionably our government is justified in protecting itself against the threat of force and revolution. This much is conceded.

But it has answered force with force. To the wild and ignorant protests of this revolutionary group, to its claim of injustice in our institutions, government has no answer save deportation and banishment. Not in this way is the mad cry of the disinherited to be met and answered. Ignorant and helpless as these people are, in the presence of these great problems that press for settlement, the government confesses by the very act of deportation, the same ignorance and helplessness. The insistent question, what would you do, receives no answer. The war has left an unreconstructed era, a terribly disarranged and dislocated industry. To these the administration opposes the *impasse* of a stony reaction.

WHAT the distracted world demands is the justice that will not be denied, the equality that is the law of civilization, the removal of the impedimenta that will make possible a true liberty among men. It does not demand the laborious building of any artificial structural form of society, any ingenious or meddling mechanism to secure a more equitable distribution. The laws of an equitable society are inherent in society itself—are with men and women as they congregate, and are there to serve the purposes of co-operation and service. Among the first things necessary to the law of association are free production and free exchange.

IT is not always that we agree with Mr. R. L. Outhwaite and articles that appear in the *Commonwealth* that he edits as the organ of the Commonwealth League, of England, but we are compelled to recognize the truth that there is in the following:

"In these days it is a dis-service to state in terms of taxation and rating the philosophy of land restoration. The mission of the evangelist fails when he appears in the guise of a tax collector. It is the interpretation of the natural law that is called for today. Not so long ago the medicine men shut the consumptive up behind closed doors and windows in a heated atmosphere and so hastened death. Now Nature has been called in—the light, the fresh air, and abundance of food. For mankind, hope alone lies in the throwing open of the doors and windows, in escape from the medicine men to Nature."

Just what should be our attitude toward the question of the Great Restoration and its relation to the method by which it is to be attained, is probably best summed up in the striking sentence of Le Baron Goeller, "Liberty the

end—Taxation the means.” That the Single Tax movement has steadily retrograded from the high moral enthusiasm with which it began to a programme of mere fiscal reform from which nearly all the juices have been very effectually squeezed out, is becoming apparent to most of us, and this accounts for the new awakening which is taking place everywhere in the movement.

AND this leads us to another consideration. There is a disposition on the part of some men calling themselves Single Taxers to postpone the adoption of the Single Tax, to approach it by such easy and gradual stages as to put its full application very far into the future. The early adoption of this great reform, they tell us, with an assumption of wisdom which most of us are too modest even to pretend to share, will cause a violent reaction, a very general business disturbance, and violent fluctuation in values. A well known Single Taxer has privately criticised the California amendment for not putting off the adoption of that measure (which others, by the way, are inclined to think too moderate) ten years instead of five. But if remoteness of time is a desideratum, why not twenty years instead of ten? Of course more babies would die in the interim and the usual two or more panics would occur in that period. “Sambo, aint it wicked to rob a chicken roost?” “Dat’s a great moral question, Grumbo; we ain’t got time to argue it now; hand down another pullet.” And so if we put off the adoption of the Single Tax, and refuse to consider it as a great moral question, the robbers of the social hen roost can pull down a few more pullets.

THOMAS G. SHEARMAN has been accused of being a conservative Single Taxer. In comparison with some of our believers today he was a wild-eyed radical. We once asked him if he would establish Free Trade at once if he had the power. “Tonight,” he replied. “What would result?” we asked. “Orders flashed to Europe by cable would multiply a hundred fold. The cables would scarcely have clerks enough to send the messages. Importations would be checked at once because of rising prices. Not a thing would be imported, probably for weeks and maybe months. Prices here would rise, too, and then slowly things would tend to an equilibrium and normal exchange relations be gradually restored on a constantly falling price level. Nothing more serious would happen.”

We do not vouch for the exact language of Mr. Shearman, nor indeed, for our present purpose, for the economic soundness of the reply. The significant thing is that this very conservative reformer, as we sometimes regard him, would have done at once the thing that was just, because it was just.

WHEN our great and good friend, General Gorgas, started out to clean up Panama he tried to do it with all possible dispatch. He did not attempt to do this by destroying so many germs at a time, with expressed tenderness for the germ-world in general and compensation to individual germs. And of course he was right. The

other method would have worked less of a revolution in Panama, fewer unpleasant disruptions and panics in the germ world, and less interference with disease-breeding activities. To do at once the thing that is just is the truest expediency, as Mr. George so often pointed out. Even if we accept the prediction of violent fluctuation in values following on the immediate adoption of the Single Tax and a short, sharp panic, it would be better thus to compress into a few months some of the inevitable losses, poverty and suffering of many dreary years.

SPEAKING editorially, the *N. Y. Times* of Dec. 5, 1919, refers to the living conditions and architectural aspect of this city, in the following terms:

“There will not always be slums; business districts will not always be grimy. The time must come, and will possibly come much sooner than our dull wits imagine, when the quarters of the poor will put on seemly raiment and the regions of warehouse and factory regain some of the dignity and beauty of the Venetian prime. Meantime, to hold a firm grasp upon all the glorious possibilities of our city is a simple act of piety to those who gave us the splendors we now enjoy.”

But these sickly-sweet and pious sentiments do not prevent the *N. Y. Times* from opposing tenaciously every measure tending to remove the tax burden which today discriminates so unfairly against every effort to provide better housing for the poor and a more appropriate setting for the Olympic feats of our industry and commerce.

Is it a case of “dull wits” merely, or is it a conscious alliance with the interests that thrive on, but do not contribute to, this great city’s health, strength and beauty?

IN the September number of the *Maccabean*, Mr. Hyman Segal contributes a long article entitled “The Winning of the Soil.” After briefly alluding to his own favorite which he calls the “Industrial Franchise,” a form of Soviet government similar in its economic features to that operating now in Russia, he devotes the rest of his article to a rather promiscuous attack on the Single Tax. Mr. Segal sees no difference in speculation in land values and speculation in “all commodities.” He has still to familiarize himself with the axioms of political economy. With that elemental confusion in his mind, he has already lost his way before starting on the journey. A short course in Adam Smith and Henry George would save him a lot of trouble in his prospective debates.

A STIMULATING discussion between Chas. H. Ingersoll and Thomas B. Wright, Manager of Industrial relations at the American Multigraph Company, is contained in *Cleveland Topics*. Both gentlemen are supposed to be discussing the Labor Question. Mr. Ingersoll surveys the fiscal and economic condition of the country and very properly attributes to it the first place in the debate. Mr. Wright prefers to confine his attention to the better adjustment of the industrial relations between employers and employed. A little more than half a century ago the

Mr. Wrights of that day were advocating better education of the negro, gentler conduct by their overseers, even a little religion of the expurgated sort. The Ingersolls of that day saw no hope for the negro or for the white but through the total abolition of chattel slavery. Both Capital and Labor are subject to humiliating relations of subserviency to the relatively small group who, through our absurd and iniquitous fiscal laws, hold and exploit all access to American soil. Perhaps the closer intercourse between Capital and Labor, which is urged by Mr. Wright, may bring to both the realization of their common enemy, the cause of their own difficulties and distress. Let us hope so. As yet, however, we see very little fruits of the larger understanding from these internal adjustments in some of our larger industrial concerns. We shall welcome them when we find them. In the meantime, we trust that the leaders of the industrial conciliation movement are under no illusion regarding the efficacy of their various devices. Their little umbrella may keep a dry spot for a while, but is of no avail against the gathering storm and deluge. The ostrich's vain hope of escaping the whirlwind by hiding its head in the cosy comfort of the sand is typical of this hurrying of our big business to the cover of such frail little devices as profit-sharing, united industrial committees, etc. We expect better things from the leaders of big business.

IN its issue of Jan. 4, 1920, the *N. Y. Times* thus refers to a report recently made by Dr. W. S. Rankin, at a meeting of the American Public Health Association:

"He said that of the 110,000,000 citizens of this country, 45,000,000 are physically imperfect; 15,000,000 die annually; 3,000,000 are in bed all the time; 1,000,000 have tuberculosis, and from 2,000,000 to 3,000,000 have hookworm and malaria. Only 37,500,000 are fairly healthy and 19,500,000 in full vigor. With all our vaunted support of higher educational institutions, it is interesting, perhaps surprising, to find that there are more persons in the insane asylums in this country than in all the colleges and universities. It is also estimated that the former cost more to maintain than do the latter.

These figures offer a strong argument for a National Department of Public Health, he said, with extensive organization and personnel, that will have among its duties those of building up the health of the people of the country. Such a department could accelerate and support to a marked degree the work already undertaken by the State and other local departments, and by such organizations as the Rockefeller Foundation."

It will occur to an increasing number of thoughtful citizens, that the deplorable situation denounced by Dr. Rankin needs for its cure something more than the creation of a new bureaucratic machine. Poverty and economic injustice are the source of most of our social mal-formations.

IT is very gratifying news that Mr. James A. Robinson, National Organizer of the Single Tax Party, sends us from the Southwest. Missouri is organized; a representative State Committee composed of some of the finest of the "Old Guard" of that State are in control, as will be seen by reference to our news columns.

What Will Zionism Bring Forth?

FROM a belated report of the proceedings of the annual meeting of the Zionist Organization of America, held at Chicago in September last, we have pleasure in reproducing a significant paragraph or two from a message sent to the Convention by Dr. Max Nordau. It is a strong document, clear in its message and high in its purpose. Dr. Nordau defines five objects which he urges the Zionist Organization to strive for. The fourth object in the list is the land problem. It reads as follows:

"4 All the land in Palestine that has belonged to the late Turkish Government must be made over to the new occupants, but shall remain the perpetual and inalienable property of the Jewish nation, and proportioned to individual occupiers only on a system of a renewable emphytheusis, in accordance with our wonderfully prophetic law of Moses of the Sabbath and Jubilee Year, which Rivadavia practically in the Argentine, and Henry George theoretically in North America, have tried to modernize."

"You American Jews have behaved wonderfully in these horrible years of war and ruin. You have given lavishly your millions. You have shrunk from no sacrifice. You have realized works of solidarity, unparalleled in history. This will be recorded forever in our annals and remain your eternal glory. But money is not everything. We now ask of you, and expect from you, that you will make a new and far more decisive effort to act efficiently in the direction of the five points I venture to submit to you."

The conspicuous part already played by the Jewish people in the history of the world, their fidelity to their race and its traditions, gives exceptional importance to every step taken toward their resurrection as a nation. It is inconceivable that, at such a time, such a virile people, disciplined in adversity and inspired by high, intense ideals, should defraud the world's expectation. That, indeed, would be the Great Betrayal.

Absentee Ownership— An Increasing Problem

UNDER the above title, the *Weekly News Letter* of the U. S. Department of Agriculture of Dec. 31, 1919, contains a report by David F. Houston, Secretary of the Department. He says:

"Land, however, is peculiarly important to all the people, and the welfare and prosperity of the community, as well as its economic and social progress, depend so vitally on its use and the relationship of the population to it that serious thought must be given to the problem of limiting absentee ownership."

Beyond lamenting the abuse of the Federal farm loan system by speculators, Mr. Houston makes no suggestion