

EDITORIALS

A Contemptible Propaganda

BY ingeniously combining stories of prize fights with professions of devotion to the popular welfare, *Colliers* a "national weekly" exponent of pre-digested bunk and guff, has managed to secure an enormous circulation, of which it is making use in an endeavor to delude the gullible public into adopting the crooked "sales tax" scheme. The sales tax plan is advocated by Messrs. Otto H. Kahn and other Wall street "bankers," promoters and financiers, for the purpose of taking the burden of taxation off the recipients of great incomes from special privileges and putting it on the many millions of consumers in the form of a tax on goods that will be added to the retail price. The dishonesty of this attempt at tax evasion by the rich lies in its pretense that by exempting privilege and taxing consumption there would be more money—capital, the predatory interests call it—for investment in industry, and that by taking from the people a larger percentage of their earnings by the device of higher prices, universal prosperity would be assured.

One of the handy tools of this conspiracy of wealth against the people is Mr. Irving T. Bush, to whom we briefly referred in a recent issue of the REVIEW. Mr. Bush is a conspicuous beneficiary of privilege in that he has got rich out of exploiting a section of New York's waterfront, the revenue from which, if the land had been properly developed by the city, would have gone into the public treasury. Not satisfied with what he has grabbed out of the earnings of labor and capital he wants to dodge paying his fair share of taxes, and hence his pitiful appeals to *Colliers* readers to join him in making dearer the things they buy by imposing all taxes on spending.

There is something peculiarly contemptible in the action of these wealthy tax-dodgers in connection with their organized propaganda to enlist the unthinking in support of a movement to put heavier tax burdens on the robbed and oppressed consumer. Yet it is not surprising that these defenders of privilege should not be satisfied with the great fortunes that our foolish laws allow them to make. The appetite grows on what it feeds upon, and in their purse-proud insolence these exploiters of labor and capital begrudge even the small part of their enormous incomes that is taken in taxes. The existing methods and systems of taxation are bad enough, but they are marvels of reason and justice compared with the iniquitous "sales tax" fraud; that is nothing more nor less than a barefaced attempt to still further plunder the wealth producers in the interest of a rapacious gang of profiteers and parasites.

Colliers' should be warned by the fate of *Leslies' Weekly*, which after an inglorious career as a defender of monopoly and privilege went into bankruptcy because its failing circulation made it of no value to its masters. It doesn't take long for the public to size up the tools of plutocracy, and when its readers realize what it is trying to do, good night *Colliers'*.

The First Step

"Land without man is a desert. Man without land is a mob. The problem of the highest statesmanship is to bring the landless man to the manless land." So said James J. Hill.

TO produce an abundance of wealth only two factors are essential—land and labor. "What! have you forgotten capital?" asks the Socialist, who thinks that there is something he calls "the capitalistic system," which he wants to destroy. The Socialist claim that the third factor is as necessary as the other two is equivalent to saying that flour, water and dough are needed to make bread. Given the flour and water, the dough is easily procured. Labor directed by ability applied to land and materials taken from the land, produces wealth, and the part of the product devoted to producing more wealth we call capital. So long as there is fertile land and willing labor, supplying capital is an easy matter.

What limits the supply of land? In a statement submitted to President Harding, Secretary of Agriculture Wallace says:

"The huge increase in the price of land in the chief agricultural States has increased rents and fixed charges, making it far more difficult for the tenant to buy a farm of his own. Too many owners hold their land for speculation."

When the city man who has hearkened to the cry of "Back to the Land" starts out to get a piece of land whereon to work, he finds himself confronted with the fact that practically all the valuable land is held by speculators. For land bought at five or ten dollars per acre, one hundred to two hundred dollars an acre is demanded. These prices are prohibitive to the great majority of would-be farmers, with the result, as stated by Secretary Wallace, that in the State of Iowa more than half of the land is now farmed by renters. Instead of home-owning farmers we are developing a great tenant class that has no interest in making permanent improvements, but is forced by high rents to rob the land of its fertility, thus reducing the productivity of an immense area of our best farm lands.

What is the best way to discourage the speculative landowner, and make him willing to sell his idle acres at a fair price? A simple change in our methods of assessing and taxing farm lands, by which land held out of use would be taxed at its full rental value, would start a selling movement that would bring land prices down to a basis of production values, instead of scarcity, or speculative value. If with this increased tax on valuable lands held out of use for purely speculative purposes, we adopt the policy of exempting from taxation all improvements made by labor with the aid of capital, we shall have taken the first practical step toward abolishing an un-economic tenantry system, and restoring the American ideal of the home-owning farmer.

AGRICULTURE is said to need greater credit facilities, but what it really needs is lower land cost.