

## PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION AND THE SINGLE TAX.

*(For the Review).*

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At first thought little connection can be seen between a purely political device like proportional representation and an economic reform like the Single Tax; but as the latter can only succeed through legislative changes, any device which favors the freer and fairer expression of the two factors, the legislator and the electorate, by which such are controlled, is bound to be helpful.

In the United States at present the political life of a Congressman is of extremely uncertain duration, because it is constantly menaced by any selfish interest that can command a compact minority of voters. The huge abuses of our army pension system, the wonder of Europe, are explained by this condition in legislation, as is also the passage of the scandalous Sherwood pension bill by a Democratic Congress, elected on a pledge of economy.

For example, take the conditions in Massachusetts during the election of this Congress in 1910. There were 203,136 Republican\* and 203,624 Democratic votes cast, in a total of 14 congressional districts, or nearly a stand-off between the two parties. In six districts, casting an aggregate of 182,000 votes, the total of the pluralities of the successful candidates, one way or the other, amounted to only 2,806, an average of 468 per district. In these six districts there are probably 18,000 pensioners, an average of 3,000 or six times the average plurality of votes for the successful Congressmen. In other words, it would almost certainly cost such a Congressman his political life if he were to consider pension bills on their merits irrespective of the attitude of his pensioner constituents, even though these latter cast only 10 per cent. of his district's total vote.

As pension conditions in Massachusetts are reflected in most of the States north of the Ohio and east of the Missouri rivers, the dilemma of the average Congressman as to pension legislation at Washington begins to be understandable.

If a Congressman loses his seat in his home district, he cannot stand for another constituency, as can an English member of Parliament, but must generally retire from political office for at least two years and often forever. Is it any wonder then that such insecurity of tenure conduces to the presence of amateur rather than professionally-trained legislators in the Lower House, or that many Congressmen will hesitate long before committing political hari-kari by taking a definite stand against any pension

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\*"Pensions, Worse and More of Them" by Chas. Francis Adams, *World's Work*, Jan., Feb. and Mar., 1911.

bill, no matter how shameless, that is backed by the pensioner vote? Are Congressmen alone blameworthy? Are they not entitled to show a proper regard for their careers? Do private employers expect to secure loyalty from their servants if an exhibition of such loyalty is likely to cost them their positions? And yet that is just what the American people are now expecting of their legislative servants.

We can see from the above that resort to a third or Single Tax party, under present conditions, would be useless as a remedy for pension abuses; for its candidates, being human, would be in just the same dilemma as are the present Congressmen. The initiative and referendum might indeed be a cure, for then the people could easily head off a pension steal by a direct vote, but the introduction of this system at Washington requires the passage of an amendment to the Federal Constitution, a long and tedious process. Is there not some method by which a State can protect its Congressmen from minority intimidation without waiting for a Federal constitutional amendment?

It appears to the writer that there is such a method and that it is that of proportional representation.

Under proportional representation, Congressmen would be elected from the State at large, instead of by districts; and with the Hare system of selection each voter can cast a vote for only one candidate, while the successful candidates are those receiving in order the highest number of votes. Thus, in Massachusetts, with its 14 Congressmen, the pensioners, as they muster only ten per cent. of the total vote, could not hope to elect more than two candidates, so that the State's Congressional delegation would then fairly instead of absurdly, reflect the pensioner strength.

Pension abuses are but one result of our crude system of popular representation, and legislative malfeasance of similar origin would also be sharply checked by proportional representation. The government ownership of public utilities, like the railroads, would involve the employment of large numbers of voters and would cause at present the same legislative menace as does our army pension system. If such government ownership be advisable, and the principles of Georgism declare that it is, we need not resort to the usually proposed remedy of the disfranchisement of public employees in order to render the change a politically-safe one. Under proportional representation, the public utility employees of each State would elect Congressmen in proportion to their own numbers, but no more, and there could then be no danger of treasury raids by a Congress inspired by the fear of a compact majority of selfish constituents.

Not only will proportional representation protect legislators from intimidation by the selfish, it will also help the political efforts of the altruistic. Then could the Land Value Tax party appeal more effectively to Single Taxers for support, for all votes cast would have a proportionate practical effect instead of being wasted as now. Thus in the cited Massachusetts

case, out of a total of 406,760 votes the Land Value Tax Party would only have to cast 27,200 votes to select one Congressman. Even in the Missouri election of 1912, in which the Single Tax Constitutional amendment was said to be overwhelmed, it yet obtained 87,000 votes out of a total of 580,000 and this would have sufficed to have elected two Congressmen out of the State's representation of sixteen.

A crying need of the Single Tax at present is more publicity so as to arouse the voters to a keen study of the Georgean proposals. The chief cause of the poor electoral results last year in the rural districts of Missouri was the menacing attitude of the farmers towards Single Tax speakers. This attitude, it is true, had been cleverly produced by the machinations of agents of the city speculators, but the latter could not have succeeded so well in their misrepresentations had it not been for the obscurity thrown around the Single Tax for years by the conspiracy of silence maintained by a monopoly controlled press. Had the Single Tax cause gained in this election its proportional representation in the Federal Congress and State Legislature, it is safe to say that the public service of these new legislators would soon have shattered the crust of rural prejudice and ignorance which made possible last year's terrorism.

To sum up—The Hare system would improve the personnel of legislation in both National and local affairs by merely making public office more permanent and independent, and thus appealing to a better-trained and more sincere class of candidates than the present single-district system. While preventing the intimidation of legislators by selfish minorities, it would give all sizable minorities an official representation in many cases where they have none now. It would thus be especially helpful to the Single Tax movement which for a long time ahead is liable to be represented by a minority party.

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### NOT A PANACEA.

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In Ottawa we hear a great deal, day in and day out, about the Single Tax, or that modification of Henry Georgeism, the taxation of land values and the exemption of improvements thereon. It has been hailed as the panacea for all evils. We have been led to believe that, when buildings are no longer taxed, all our troubles from the cradle to the grave will have disappeared.—Local paper.

When William Lloyd Garrison, the younger, announced his conversion to the Single Tax in a letter to Henry George, he took pains to state he did not believe it to be a panacea, and Mr. George replied: "Neither do I; but I believe that freedom is and the Single Tax is the tap-root of freedom." Freedom, says Louis F. Post, is to social order what pure air is to physical health, and the Single Tax principle makes freedom possible.—Ottawa (Can.) *Citizen*.