

WHAT IS THE SINGLE TAX.(For the Review)*By **WM. BRADFORD DUBOIS.**

The question of taxation is a very old one, and its literature would fill a large library. How and what to tax in order to raise revenue for the nation, the State, or the municipality, has engaged the attention of political economists, has agitated the breasts and disturbed the rest of statesmen and legislators since statesmen and legislators have existed.

Taxation, in its last analysis, means labor, and all taxes must ultimately be paid from the product of labor, but the method in which taxes are levied; in other words, those particular objects which come under the ban, so to speak, of the assessor, determine in a large measure, how much of the labor of the citizens shall be contributed towards the expenses of government.

Says Adam Smith: "The subjects of every State ought to contribute towards the support of the government as nearly as possible in proportion to the revenue which they enjoy under the protection of the State."

The history of taxation reminds one somewhat of the advice of the Irishman at Donnybrook Fair: "When you see a head, hit it." When you see anything to tax, tax it.

In the United States, national revenues are mostly raised by a tariff or tax on about 4000 articles of import. This is what is known as indirect taxation, and has been aptly described as "the art of plucking the goose without making it squeal." The same thing is true of internal revenue taxes, which are another form of indirect taxation. The revenues of states, counties and municipalities are derived mostly from taxes on personal property and on real estate.

The Single Taxers would abolish all these taxes and substitute a simple system of direct taxation—in short, a single tax upon the site value of land irrespective of improvements, and this would be not only a vast improvement over the prevailing system, considered from a fiscal standpoint, but it would be, at the same time, greatly conducive to the prosperity and happiness of the people of the United State.

Taxes upon imports are unjust and unwise for the following reasons: They lead to smuggling, lying and hypocrisy. They erect unfriendly barriers between nations, and interfere with the natural course of trade. They are

* In accordance with our policy of presenting in each issue a brief and suggestive answer to the inquiry, "What is the Single Tax?" we print an essay from the pen of a well known Single Taxer of New Jersey and another from Mr. J. C. Barnes, of Arcola, Ill. There is nothing herein that is new to believers, but they are plain simple statements which the inquirer should find little difficulty in understanding. Our next issue will contain an article from the pen of Mr. Peter Aitken, who will answer the question in a somewhat different way.—Editor *Single Tax Review*.

taxes upon consumption, and hence must be paid by the consumer in increased prices. They fall much more heavily upon the working classes than upon the rich because the living expenses of the working classes constitute a much larger percentage of their incomes than do those of the rich.

Internal revenue taxes are unjust and unwise, because they, like import taxes, must be paid by the consumers in enhanced prices or in inferior articles; they, like import taxes, interfere with individual rights and create a horde of useless office holders to be fed at the public crib, and they, like import taxes, foster the growth of trusts and monopolies. Witness the whiskey and tobacco trusts of to-day and remember the match monopoly before the removal of the stamp tax.

We had an income tax during the civil war and raised a large amount of revenue from it. It is a just tax, if justly levied, but very unpopular because of its inquisitorial nature, and it is bound to be evaded to a very great extent. Taxes on personal property are also notoriously obnoxious, and justly so, and are paid, for the most part, by a comparatively few honest and conscientious people and evaded by the rest. Many of the most valuable forms of personal property can be easily hidden from the tax assessor, and of those forms that are not so easily hidden, the ordinary assessor is not capable of forming a just estimate of their value without becoming inquisitorial and obnoxious.

For all purposes of local taxation, then, real estate must bear the brunt. By real estate is now understood land with the buildings and improvements thereon. But our present system of real estate taxation discriminates unjustly in favor of the owners of unimproved land and against the owners of houses, factories, etc., the former being assessed at an average of not over one-third of its selling value, and the latter fully twice as much.

The Single Tax, by taking taxes off houses and improvements and taxing only the land according to its value would, on the contrary, discriminate in favor of the owners of houses and improvements and against the owners of unimproved land. In favor of the land user and against the mere land owner, hence in favor of labor and employers of labor and against owners and monopolists.

That this would be the effect a little thought will make clear. What the people of the United States need to make them more prosperous is more wealth—a much larger production and a more even distribution of wealth. All wealth is produced by the application of labor to the land, assisted by the various elements and forces of nature. The fact that what is known as capital enters into the production of wealth does not alter this statement, capital itself being originally produced by labor. By labor is meant the expenditure of human energy, physical or mental, and by land, the earth and all it contains.

Whatever tends to make it easier for labor to have access to land aids in the production of wealth.

The Single Tax would do this by making land cheaper. The owners of valuable lands of all kinds now held out of use, would be compelled either to put them to some good use or sell them for what they could get to some one

who would use them. If they persisted in holding them idle they would be obliged to pay the community for that wrongful privilege, a thing they would not be likely to do for any length of time. Land monopoly and land speculation would be destroyed, but although the selling value of land would be greatly diminished, its value for use would be as great as ever. Land being plentiful and cheap the opportunities for labor would be vastly more numerous than at present. It is true that all men could not get their living directly from the land, but a sufficient number would be able to do so to relieve the labor market.

On the other hand an immense impetus would be given to the production of wealth by the removal of the various taxes that now weigh upon industry. Put a tax on dogs and the result is fewer dogs. Tax fences and people will do without them as far as possible. Tax fruit trees, and the owners will cut them down. Take the taxes off machinery and you encourage manufactures. Take the taxes off houses and more houses will be built. All this would mean a greater demand for labor, and where the demand for labor is good wages are high. To make a good demand for labor is the only way by which the wages of the working masses can be advanced. When there is no such demand, no strikes or boycotts, no combinations or trades unions can permanently prevent wages from falling. When the working people are prosperous, business men will be prosperous too. No one can deny that if the Single Tax will bring about such a result, its serious study is demanded by all those who would foster by their agitation and votes the improvement of the economic condition of our people.

WHAT IS THE SINGLE TAX?

(For the Review.)

BY J. C. BARNES.

It is not a tax at all in the sense given by the dictionaries, as "A *charge* or *burden* laid upon *persons* or *property* for the support of a Government." It is a term used for want of a better one to concisely express the *modus operandi* of collecting the economic rent or annual *value* of land for all the people—land values being the only values produced by *all* the people in common, which should be collected annually and restored to the common treasury for all the people. This fund may be drawn upon by the people in lieu of all other taxation for public needs. The annual value of land, exclusive of all wealth *on* the land, is exactly adequate to defray the expenses of national, state, county and municipal governments, and seems to be a *Natural Tax* if it may for purposes of popular understanding be termed a tax.

The *principal* object of the so-called Single Tax is to equalize the use of