

SINGLE TAX AND DIRECT LEGISLATION.

While we believe in legislation by the people, in that means to the attainment of democracy known as direct legislation by the initiative and referendum, there are certain considerations respecting the demands for these reforms to which it may be of importance for Single Taxers to direct their attention.

Most important of all is the truth that political democracy cannot exist without a true economic basis. This ought to be clearly apprehended by every disciple of Henry George. If representative government has failed—as is the too broad contention of those who stand for direct legislation as the first and most needed reform—it is largely because of unjust and unstable economic conditions. It is also due in almost equal measure to the apathy and want of intelligent conviction among the people themselves.

For it cannot be contended with entire truth that representative government is wholly unresponsive to popular demands. If this were true we should have made no progress under it, yet under this system great reforms have been fought and won. And though it is not true that the people at all times and everywhere get the best government they deserve, nor that their representatives always truly represent them, there is nevertheless enough truth in such generalization to arrest the somewhat hasty conclusions to which our friends of the direct legislation leagues too lightly leap.

The consideration that should most seriously concern us, however, as Single Taxers, is the order of precedence of these two reforms. Political and economic reform are both important. But political reform, even of the kind which would apparently enable us sooner to secure permanent economic reform, must be based, as we have indicated, upon two conditions; a more intelligent apprehension respecting the laws of production and distribution and greater equality of possession among the people. It is even conceivable that the body of voters, untrained in economic thought, ignorant or unconscious of their

basic rights, called upon to decide on questions of legislation affecting the reform to which Single Taxers are pledged, would yield less readily than representative bodies to the influence of active minorities preaching insistently a great truth.

We may be accused of a lack of faith in the people, of a distrust of real democracy. On the contrary, our belief is in democracy. But democracy is not political merely—it is economic. Disinherited men cannot be political freemen—such men cannot freely exercise political rights. And the House of Democracy built upon the unsafe sands of economic slavery must sooner or later totter to its foundations. But men conscious of their economic rights will build wisely and securely. They will readily overcome such imperfections as may exist in the machinery of government for the free expression of their will, overturning them where they exist and substituting better forms of democracy where imperfect forms survive.

Today many business men and merchants are conscious of the burdens imposed by present methods of taxation. They would, were it left to them, reorganize the system on a basis nearer the ideal which we of the George faith cherish. Certainly they are prepared to take the initial steps that are involved in the adoption of the Single Tax system—that are necessary for its beginning. Is it quite so certain that a plebecite would support them in this demand? We know how utterly ill-informed and careless the average man is on matters of taxation. Because he does not feel the burdens, he assumes he does not bear them. It is precisely the class who feel these burdens who have, under our representative system of government, the influence that counts most with our legislators. It is for this reason—and not because of wide popular comprehension of our demands—that we are making the progress that is everywhere visible. Before we can safely depend upon the masses to support us, much remains to be done along the lines of effective education. And yet it seems to be assumed that the triumph of the Single Tax cause awaits only the verdict of a plebecite. Let us not so delude ourselves.

This may not be a conclusive argument

against direct legislation, and it is not so intended. But it is an argument for education in the principles we hold before attempting to perfect the machinery of government. And let us reflect that six states, or one eighth of the union, now have direct legislation. If a working example of the Single Tax is desired as sufficient to convert the rest of the United States, and it is held that such example may be most speedily secured where this system is in operation, it would seem that the field is already broad enough for experiment, and that labors for further extension of the system may well be left to other hands, while Single Taxers devote themselves to the more important work of teaching men their economic rights.)

The important question is as to the duty of the hour. Should Single Taxers stop even for a short time on the road as preachers of economic righteousness to perfect governmental machinery? We believe it is no part of our work—that the goal of democracy will be sooner won by teaching men their economic rights. "Then something will break loose," as Mr. Fels says elsewhere in these columns. Men will break their political bonds along with their economic bonds. The whole unjust and defective political framework of society will yield to economic assault—for it is built on economic injustice and the ignorance and apathy of men as to their basic rights.

Perhaps there might be some excuse for Single Taxers engaging actively in the fight for direct legislation if this cause were being neglected. But as a matter of fact it is in good hands. It has won splendid victories in Oregon, Oklahoma and Maine, and is finding lodgement elsewhere. It has secured leaders of exceptional power and ability, such as Senator Bourne, of Oregon, and George H. Shibley, of Washington, D. C., whose services to the cause merit more than this passing recognition. Perhaps it is an evolution of democracy; certainly, its triumph seems inevitable. And it is perhaps just as well for the cause of direct legislation that it has not found its chief apostles in Single Taxers, or rather that the body of Single Taxers has not bent its energies to securing it. And this for reasons that will appear obvious enough

to the thoughtful. It is at all events better for the Single Tax movement, for there would be present the temptation to disavow its importance to the Single Tax while advancing the delusive plea that it was in the interest of all true reforms—a plea none the less delusive because true. We do not imagine that those who compose the bodies actively engaged in the work for direct legislation will be especially grateful for Single Tax agitation in its favor.

There is another temptation, too. The movement for the initiative and referendum is popular—ever so much more popular than the Single Tax. It brings the brilliant men of our movement in association with brilliant men elsewhere—and intellectual comradeship of this order has its fascinations—and its dangers. But at all events, to the extent it diverts our leaders from their real work as preachers of economic righteousness, it is distinctly unfortunate.—J. D. M.

ALEXANDER MACKENDRICK.

(See frontispiece.)

Mr. Alexander MacKendrick, (President for the year of the Scottish League for the Taxation of Land Values) is an enthusiast in all that concerns the well being and advancement of the League over which he for the time being presides. Outside this sphere he is widely recognized as a careful student of public affairs. In his earlier years, he devoted much time to the study of the writings of Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and other 19th Century philosophers. In this connection Mr. MacKendrick enjoys the society of many of the Professors who have held Chairs in the Glasgow University, and of many able journalists and authors.

He became identified with the Henry George movement in Scotland some ten years ago, when he commenced valiantly to argue himself into a belief in the teachings of Henry George. He studied "Progress and Poverty" diligently, and discussed the subject matter of the book with an open mind in all its moods and tenses. In due course he became firmly convinced