

fraction to the price of wheat per bushel. With costs of production rising as they are the business is fast becoming or already has become an unpayable one—the farmer cannot make the wages of ordinary unskilled labour although he and his wife and children toil long hours in solitude and discomfort to try and make a living. This explains in some measure the rush to the cities, the various impractical schemes for “assisting” the farmer at his own expense, and the general stagnation in our interior development. The same applies to mining, fruit-growing, and the other primary industries. They are being cruelly and unjustly bled in order to maintain special privileges for other classes who have secured a political “pull.”

The outlook is exceedingly serious and grows worse every day. The big harvest of last year has not yet left our shores and is subject to a big deterioration in value even if the War continues. Before the last third of it has left our wharves the next season's harvest will be coming in. Had the socialistic Commonwealth Government not interfered, it could all have been got away, though at an increased cost for freight. Now no one can say how great the loss will be. In the meantime there is an incessant howl from the Melbourne and Sydney manufacturers for the already high Tariff to be made “effective,” in other words, still higher. Notwithstanding the fact that it is already extremely high, that the exports of Germany and Austria are blocked altogether, and that freights are abnormally dear and that they are flooded with War contracts, manufacturers are still eager to exploit the “patriotic spirit” and get even more. These are the people who are welcoming and banquetting Mr. Hughes.

This is a plain statement of the case. The development of the country is being steadily strangled by the ever-increasing taxes and costs of production due to socialistic experimentation and class legislation. The national debt has reached enormous dimensions and against its expenditure we have to show a collection of out-of-date railways which it would take tens of millions to put into uniform and up-to-date efficiency, no facilities for the bulk handling of grain, and an increasingly expensive army of civil servants whose demands no political party can afford to ignore. Meanwhile lots of good but poorly-informed people are talking empty platitudes about what we should do in the way of “settling returned soldiers upon the land.” The plain fact is that we have effectively “settled” the bulk of the people who are already there. Victorian Labour Leaders themselves admit that, in four years, disregarding births, the population of Melbourne increased by 46,000 while that of the country had decreased by 96. Further, that out of every 100 immigrants 99 settled in Melbourne and one in the country, and that there are fewer people on the land than there were thirty years ago. This in Victoria—the fertile garden State of Australia.

Or take the illuminating Report issued by the Inter-State Commission which recently made a lengthy investigation into the working of the Tariff. They found that there had been an increase in the population of the Commonwealth for ten years, equal to 18 per cent. During the same period the number of persons engaged in primary production increased by about 10 per cent., while the hands employed in factories increased by 58·44 per cent. Taking the female section—the mothers of the next generation—those engaged in primary production decreased by 59 per cent. while the factory battalion increased by 96·56 per cent. “This employment of female labour in our manufacturing industries demands very particular attention,” remarked the Commissioners. It certainly does, when we consider our scanty population, the losses of manhood through the War and the difference between the physique and maternal capacity of the country-bred as against that of the average city factory girl. But then the case is explained by the rates of wages. In 1913 the average male factory worker got £119 8s. 1d. per annum; the average female, £46 11s. 6d.

This is the state of things industrial in this Paradise of the workers, this special experimental plot of the Fabianised theorists—the highbrows who were so much wiser than Richard Cobden, Herbert Spencer, and Henry George. Is it not time the people were roused from their slumbers to a knowledge of the facts?

FACING THE LAND QUESTION

By P. WILSON RAFFAN, M.P.

(President of the English League for the Taxation of Land Values.)

(*Appearing in REYNOLDS'S NEWSPAPER, October 1st.*)

There is one great deep, underlying principle of all sound, just, beneficent land laws in every land—that land in all countries was created by Providence for the benefit of all those who dwell therein, and that any privileges, rights, or interests attaching for the time being, whatever their origin may be, to the ownership of land that are inconsistent with this great purpose, ought, in the interests of the community, to be ruthlessly overridden.—Right Hon. D. LLOYD GEORGE, M.P.

Schemes of social reconstruction are everywhere in the air. The issues raised by the problem of demobilisation carry us very far. It will not be sufficient to restore the returned soldier to his old home and his old conditions of labour. In tens of thousands of cases the home was a hovel or a city slum. Periods of unemployment alternated with periods of uncongenial, exhausting, and ill-requited toil. We all feel that the brave men who have fought so gallantly for us deserve better treatment than that, and that if only for their sake a determined effort must be made to put an end to slums, and sweating, and the evil conditions of pre-war days.

Hence these schemes of social reconstruction. They are all well-intentioned, but I think they nearly all fail because they are not sufficiently radical. If we are to secure these improved conditions for our people, there must be an immense accession to our national wealth, and this obviously necessitates a great acceleration of national production.

Well, we can plan, and dodge, and twist, and wriggle as we will; we cannot effectively grapple with the problem of increased production unless we face the Land Question and all that it implies. In the last analysis, we can only produce more wealth by the application of labour to land. There is no other way. And if labour is shut off from access to land, or if access be rendered difficult by an all-embracing system of land monopoly, all the good feeling in the world will not advance us a single step towards our objective.

Labour is so shut off in this country at the present time. There is not a town or an urban district, struggling for expansion, which has not its own story to tell of developments crippled and thwarted by land monopoly. As a matter of fact, in the urban districts of the country only about one-third of the land is developed and built on. The other two-thirds are described as “agricultural land.” If anybody thinks this is a true description, he might endeavour to purchase it. He would then find that although the owners keep it out of industrial use, hoping that the pressure of population will render it still more valuable as the years go by, they are by no means inclined to part with it at its agricultural value. If it be really wanted for factories, or workshops, or houses, or schools, or any form of communal expansion, the price demanded is frequently so high as to be prohibitive, and the projected development has consequently to be abandoned.

It is clear, surely, that the vastly accelerated production which we desire cannot flourish under such a system as this. How is it to be broken down? My suggestion is that we should transfer the burden of rates from buildings and improvements to the unimproved value of the land, whether used or unused. This is clearly equitable, because the value which would be appropriated by the community

is entirely a communal creation. It is due solely to the presence, the activity, the enterprise, and the expenditure of the community. It is, therefore, fully justified as a rating reform, but it would be much more than a rating reform. It would render it unprofitable to hold land out of use, and the owners would vie with each other in seeking to utilise their two and a half million acres for productive purposes. The building of factories and workshops would be encouraged, and new and spacious streets would spring up in the outskirts of every town and urban district.

What is true of the town and urban district is true of the country also. At present our land is only half farmed, or less than half farmed. Despite the record prices ruling for all forms of farm produce, over 300,000 acres have gone out of cultivation during the period of the war, and no less than 4,000,000 acres have ceased to be cultivated during the past forty years. It is little wonder. If land is kept out of use altogether, it escapes rates altogether. If it is used for sport, the least desirable use of any, it pays rates on the lowest scale. Land used for ordinary agricultural purposes is rated much higher; land subjected to intensive culture, and producing at its maximum capacity, is rated highest of all. A more topsy-turvy system it is impossible to conceive, and if we are to make the best of the land, either in town or country, it is essential that it should be altered without delay.

This is the fundamental reform. It would secure increased production, steady and well-remunerated employment, and healthy housing for all our people. It would give the returned soldier a real stake in his own country and a real chance of a successful career. We owe it to him to see that no obstacle blocks the way, and there is no obstacle but one—the obstacle of vested interests. That, however, is an obstacle which, in the words of the Minister for War with which I have headed this article, “should be ruthlessly overridden.”

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UNITED STATES SINGLE TAX CONFERENCE

THE SINGLE TAX REVIEW for September-October (150, Nassau Street, New York City, N.Y.) contains an informing descriptive Report of the Niagara Falls Single Tax Conference, by Joseph Dana Miller, editor of the REVIEW. No similar gathering, says the report, has ever been more representative, more democratic, more harmonious. Several facts stand out prominently. One, and perhaps the chief, was the extraordinary ability of the presiding officer (Mrs. Alice Thatcher Post) in guiding the deliberations of a body often excitable and frequently carried away by the emotion of its orators. Even adequate praise of Mrs. Post would seem extravagant. Another woman whose gentle but all-persuasive presence dominated the Conference was Mrs. Mary Fels, the Saint Paula of the movement. In her the Conference had before it the embodiment of that spirit of helpfulness, encouragement, and toleration which marked its deliberations.

The resolutions as to change of constitution of the Joseph Fels Fund Commission were stated in last month's LAND VALUES.

REPORT OF DAN KIEFER

Chairman of the Joseph Fels Fund Commission

If from the Great Beyond Joseph Fels can behold this gathering, I know the pleasure that he must feel.

The exceeding joy which it gave him to see the workers together and participate in their discussions, is known to all who have attended previous Conferences.

In the fact that this Conference exceeds in number the first day's meeting of any previous gathering, is alone evidence of how efficiently his work is being continued by Mary Fels.

Joseph Fels lived long enough to see the Single Tax become a live, political issue, largely through his own work. If he can still see what is going on here, it will not be many years before he sees that the continuation of his work has resulted in widespread adoption of the complete Single Tax. We have this year pending two State-wide campaigns in which the issue is application of the unlimited Single Tax. This brings up discussion of it, not only as a tax reform measure, but as the means of destroying land monopoly and emancipating labour.

We have this year received the unqualified approval of the National Executive Board of the American Federation of Labour. It is to the honour of organised labour in Oregon that it has initiated the sweeping measure, which, if adopted, will put into the public treasury of the State the entire rental value of Oregon land. It is to the honour of the National representatives of organised labour that the measure has been accorded their endorsement, and the labour movement of the nation committed to the support of the only practicable means of permanently bettering the condition of all wealth producers.

In California, the result of the repeated campaigns is shown in the effort on the part of a hostile tax commission to stop further progress, by offering concessions in the form of an increment tax, forgetful of the fact that no progressive movement has ever been stopped that way.

Though we have suffered what might superficially appear to be a reverse at Pueblo, Colo., in the repeal by 200 votes of the Single Tax amendment to the City Charter, it was morally a gain. The vote as cast showed an actual gain for the proposition and the repeal was only accomplished through illegal wholesale disfranchisement of our voters. Then the actual result of repeal has shown the people, as nothing else could, the oppressive nature of the present system, as compared with even a very faulty administration of a partial application to local affairs of the Single Tax system.