

# The Single Tax Review

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## Current Comment

THE New York *Globe*, commenting on the birth rate in France, turns its attention to the United States. "Increasing population," it says, "spells prosperity for no one save the landlord, and not always for him. The United States has industrial depression, unemployment and misery just as readily with 105,000,000 as with 80,000,000, or half that."

The *Globe* says that "While the development of machinery makes it possible for each worker to produce far more than he can consume, we have counterbalanced this by creating a very large parasitic class not engaged in production or distribution." "Getting warm," as the children say in their games. What is the chief parasitic class? The *Globe* has answered it when it says that "population spells prosperity for no one but the landlord, and not always for him."

BUT why not be more explicit? Many will read the editorial and make nothing of it. The idea in the editorial mind is not clearly indicated, save to the economic elect. But manifestly the *Globe* is not writing for this class. It wants to convey an idea to its readers now only partially informed, and perhaps groping for a solution of the economic difficulties confronting us. Its diagnosis is accurate enough, but not couched in terms that the reader can follow readily.

WHAT the *Globe* wants to say is this. The vast increase in production goes chiefly to those who own the natural resources of the country. The producer does not get it. The reason he does not get it is because this parasitic class absorbs the increase in ground rent, and because we encourage the holding out of use these always abundant opportunities for employment there are industrial depressions, unemployment and social misery. Of course, the remedy for this is indicated in the very statement of the problem, but the *Globe*, like a timid swimmer standing on the bank, hesitates to take the plunge. Yet if it does not jump off soon, it is going to get pushed off.

M. R. J. SPRAGUE, of the Department of Economics and Sociology of the Massachusetts Agricultural College, speaking on the causes of race suicide among native Americans, says: "We throttle the family and penalize those who attempt to have homes by excessive taxation on dwellings. . . . We are allowing the old unjust property tax system to kill the home. We penalize by taxation any man who extends his house for the accommodation of his children, his mother or any other dependant, while if he spent his money selfishly for his pleasures the tax collector

would not see him." It is such utterances as these from our educators that suggest an awakening knowledge of the real significance of the problem that these men must take a hand in solving.

SOME one having discovered the Dollar Mark along with the Lover's Knot over the door of St. Thomas' Church, the architect, E. Donald Robb, explains that he "drew the design with the notion of conveying something symbolic of marriage and particularly what modern Fifth Avenue marriage has so often been."

The architect is surely frank enough. While it is true that such curious symbolism was greatly prevalent in the religious architecture of the middle ages, running even to fantastic extremes, its introduction into modern decorative design is carried here to a point that cannot but suggest deliberate intention at satire.

How some of the wealthy pew-holders of St. Thomas', whose daughters have passed over the threshold of the Bride's Door, will regard the curious symbolism and the architect's explanation, may furnish matter for conjecture. But in our modern society, based essentially upon Privilege, the conjunction of a perfunctory religion, calculated matrimony and the Dollar Mark, suggests a Trinity that might appropriately take precedence over that to which a rather more formal allegiance is professed.

AN illustration of what Single Taxers mean when they say that "The Rent of Land Belongs to the People," is the recent offer made for the Democratic Club, 5th Avenue and 85th Street, of a million and a half. It was purchased for \$175,000. This increase in value is due to the growth of the city, to its increasing population, to all that is being done, publicly and privately, by the teeming millions of those engaged in the industrial activities of a great city. It is a value earned by all the people and pocketed by the few. Now merely as a question of *meum* and *tuum*, should it not go to the people who produce it?

THE American Child Hygiene Association has issued its report for 1920. The report covers 519 cities with a population of over 36,000,000. Those who believe that everything is all right in this best of all possible worlds, will perhaps find food for reflection in the revelations of this report in which is disclosed the "wastage of human life due to ignorance, poverty and bad housing." Eleven out of 100 babies die during the first year, and 20 out of every 100 school children show the effects of malnutrition.

MORE than one thousand brokers have been licensed by the State Real Estate Department of California to maintain offices at Long Beach to sell real estate. Only

a few of these men under present conditions render any real service to society. Granting the desirability, even the necessity, of the functions performed by real estate agents in bringing together buyer and seller, most of what today is called the "real estate business" is based on land speculation and represents neither a direct nor an indirect contribution to production. Yet all those engaged in what after all is a mere parasitical industry must be housed and clothed by those who are doing the real work of the world. To a very great degree these 1,000 men live on the others.

**T**HE mayor of Boston, Hon. Andrew J. Peters, is not above the usual run of mayors in his knowledge of taxation. He calls the real estate tax of his city "excessive." It is "excessive" because "out of all proportion to the profits from that form of investment"—which dictum if applied to that part of real estate which is land will not greatly appeal to Single Taxers or the tenants of Boston. But another statement of the mayor's is interesting, and may well reassure the landlords that no matter what the tax is on land they will escape it. (sic) "Even the tax on land, in defiance of economic theory, is usually shifted," says the Honorable Andrew.

If this is the case, it is so unique that it calls for investigation by the National Tax Association before which, at its annual convention, this address was delivered. But the fact is that the National Tax Association, instead of being what it once promised to be, an organization for the study of taxation in all its incidence, is now merely a reactionary body that is being used by the opponents of genuine tax reform. Its declared purposes are not its real purposes.

**O**F course, the tax on land is not "usually shifted," nor is it shifted at all. The statement, unaccompanied by any attempt at demonstration, is merely an attempt of Mayor Peters to deceive, not his hearers, who probably know better, but the rent payers of Boston.

Thus the question suggests itself, how much longer are the mayors of American cities to be permitted to act as agents for the real estate interests of the communities over which they are called upon to preside? Either Mayor Peters is a rank humbug and a fraud, or he is grossly ignorant of a subject on which it is his duty to be informed. In either case he is unfit to be mayor of Canarsie, not to mention the city of light and leading.

I went to France and fought the foe  
As sergeant in the infantry;  
My landlord and his many sons  
Stayed home and waved the flag for me.  
—JACK HONEST, in *Evening World*, N. Y.

AS WE understand the Communist, if you knock him down and give him a thorough licking, he has no rights at all.

—H. M. H.

## Leaders of Forlorn Hopes

**I**N July-August REVIEW we wrote as follows:

"The usual quadrennial farce of selecting candidates for municipal offices is now being played to empty benches. How poverty-stricken in character and capacity the old parties are is shown by the men who are being touted for the nominations—at best amiable accidents, at worst, mercenary mediocrities, men without a glimmer of an idea how the city can be extricated from the morass in which it is floundering as the result of the treachery or stupidity of its past governors and the hopelessly rotten economic system which lies at the root of all its troubles. Surely some citizen of capacity and character can be found willing to take up the ungrateful but honorable task of pointing out the only road that leads to redemption and salvation."

The foregoing was particularly addressed to men like Amos Pinchot who have the vision but who lack the intrepidity that makes leaders of men, and who at critical times in the world's history betake themselves to their closets, and leave their followers to fight in a leaderless army. It is melancholy indeed that when such men choose the "easiest way," and refuse the great call that comes to them perhaps only once in a lifetime, and who at such times begin to weigh the hazards of battle, and their personal preferences for more peaceful activities.

It is a difficult choice, indeed. We do not condemn; nor do we doubt that these men are acquitted of their consciences. But it is impossible not to feel a keen and profound sorrow that their courage is not equal to their vision, that because victory seems so doubtful they prefer the quiet of the camp to the hazards of the field.

The leaders of forlorn hopes! These are the men who sallied forth when the future seemed darkest. The Cobdens, the Brights, the Garrisons, and he, our leader whom we delight to honor, Henry George. These are the men who make history. No hope is forlorn, and no faith fails of triumph that is linked with a splendid truth. The leaders of such "forlorn hopes" mould institutions—their cause is never hopeless.

There are men in this country now in public life whose courage is equal to their idealism. We can only regret that they do not possess the full vision. Nevertheless we do right to honor them.

We open the August number of the *World's Work*. Here is an article by Henry Morgenthau. He tells of his work in electing Wilson. He pictures the conflict that waged within him between idealism and materialism. It is a frank and interesting self-revelation. He says:

At fifty-seven years of age, rich in money and experience, and recently released from the toils of materialism, it ceaselessly confronted me with my duty to pay back, in the form of public service, the overdraft which I had been permitted to make upon the opportunities of the country."

Henry Morgenthau did not hesitate in choosing the paths that stretched before him. It matters not whether his vision lacked completeness, or whether we elect to quarrel