

Social Service: A Monthly Review of Social and Industrial ..., Volumes 7-10  
edited by Josiah Strong, William Howe Tolman

## FAIRHOPE: AN EXPERIMENT IN SINGLE TAX

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Everyone nowadays considers himself something of a reformer. Few or none are satisfied with things as they are. But the extent to which one goes in the matter of reform depends less upon the magnitude of the evil to be corrected than upon the sense of individual responsibility of the reformer. Many go no further than to recognize evils and nurse their discontent; others in their self-righteousness are satisfied when they have found some one upon whom they may fix the blame, and some, more philosophical, discern a remedy and call loudly upon others to apply it. Few indeed are there who, accepting the responsibility of existing wrongs as personal to themselves, assume the task of clearly apprehending the evil, discerning its cause, and when they have found a remedy attempting with skill, persistence and energy to apply it.

The opposition of selfish interests is so bitter, the apathy of the masses of mankind so great, and the misconception and distrust of those who should be allies so disheartening that multitudes who have the kindly impulse and prophetic vision of reformers, halt in their zeal upon the threshold of definite action.

Again, as a rule, the greater the evil to be removed, the more firmly is it imbedded in the intricacies of existing customs and institutions, and the reformer has not only the task of meeting the opposition of those evil influences which he would overthrow, but he is apt to introduce confusion and trouble among elements which while not opposed to his reform are obliged to take new adjustments to conform to it. so that when he wrings from the public the sentiment "it might have been, but now it is too late it cannot be" he is apt to flatter himself with the thought that he has at least accomplished something in winning recognition for his idea, and he hesitates long before he answers this judgment of the world in the calm assurance of the victor and proclaims upon the housetop: "It is a part of the divine plan; it is not too late, and it shall be."

It was in this spirit of optimism and devotion that a handful of reformers in Des Moines, Iowa, "took up the cross of the New Crusade." and adopting as their motto, "We will make good theories work," determined to give the world an object lesson in the application of the single tax theory as taught by Henry George. This was in 1894.

Though few in numbers and poor in purse they were strong in the faith that some way might be found to illustrate with a concrete example the truth and beauty of that plan which seemed so just and fair in the abstract.

To accomplish this purpose they had recourse to the device of a joint stock company which should own and administer such a tract of land as they might secure. In no State of the Union is the machinery of civil government under existing laws adapted to the task of placing the burdens of all public services upon land values only, but by this use of a corporation that object was attained through a proprietary government.

As the promoters of this enterprise were poor and their capital small it became necessary to buy land where it could be cheaply obtained; and in Baldwin County, Alabama, such a place was found.

The eastern shore of Mobile Bay is an elevated plateau affording a most beautiful and healthful location, and it was here that the site was chosen for the experiment. Here the undeveloped resources of nature could be utilized without antagonizing those monopoly interests which had seized upon all the available lands that are tributary to the vast systems of transportation that have exploited while they have developed the transcontinental routes.

The early development of the little colony that was planted here was subject to all the vicissitudes of pioneer life incident to the clearing of forests, and the bringing to a state of fertility a soil naturally poor and lacking in some chemical elements that had to be supplied by artificial means. From a beginning of less than a score who settled upon its lands in 1895 Fairhope has grown to a flourishing village and farming community of nearly three hundred persons. It has had a steady but increasing growth from the beginning, with every prospect that the present year will see more rapid progress than ever.

The distinctive features of the plan adopted are as follows:

The ownership of the land is vested in the Fairhope Industrial Association which holds and administers it in trust for all the people who live upon it. Any one, whether a member of the association or not, may acquire possession of a portion of its lands by paying an annually appraised rental which is so levied as to "equalize" the varying advantages of location and natural qualities of its different tracts and convert into the treasury of the association for the common benefit of its lessees all values attaching to such lands not due to the efforts or expenditures of the lessees." The association on its part gives ninety-nine-year leases, and agrees to pay all taxes levied by county and State upon its lands and all improvements of lessees thereon, and on all personal property of its lessees, moneys and credits excepted. After paying State and county taxes the balance of the revenues from rent is to be expended for local public improvements.

In the administration of its affairs the membership of the association is accorded full use of the principles of the initiative and referendum and imperative mandate. By these means the will of the public is absolute in the affairs of the colony, and its officers become the servants of the people in fact as well as in name. Under the provisions of the constitution all elections must be by secret ballot and the names of all officers must be put upon the ballots for return to the places of which they are incumbent unless they decline re-election. This is to avoid the danger of any one being obliged to depend upon the nomination of a clique for his continuance in office. Once a servant of the people he is continued in office as long as his services give satisfaction to his constituents.

Another feature of the system at Fairhope is the public ownership of all public utilities. The surplus of rentals in excess of the amount needed for State and county taxes provides a considerable sum for such local public services as are needed. The association is forbidden to contract any bonded or interest-bearing debt, but it is required to use all its available funds for the common benefit. It is also expected to take all of the unearned increment of the land leaving all its lands with a net uniform value. Under this principle the rentals vary from 50 cents per acre per year on the poorest and most remote lands to over \$30 per acre per annum for the most valuable lands centrally located.

Under these general provisions the lessee is guaranteed absolute control and use of

the land set apart to him for all purposes not physically or morally offensive to a majority of the resident members of the association. In every other respect the business of the community is in private hands and is conducted for private interests the same as it is in other communities.

Fairhope has now three good stores, two for general merchandise and one exclusively for dry goods and millinery. Besides it has a drug store, a bakery, a butcher shop, a carpenter shop, a blacksmith, a cobbler, a dentist and a tailor, also a laundry, a hotel and a livery stable. There is also upon its grounds a saw and planing mill which is equipped with a mill for cleaning rice.

The people of Fairhope are very liberal and intelligent and support a good public school out of its land rentals with such funds as are needed in addition to the very meagre support provided under the State laws. In addition to the school its educational interests are supplemented by a free circulating library of over 2,000 volumes.

Its spiritual wants are supplied by two organized churches of the Congregational and Christian denomination, and a "Progress League," or People's Church, which meets weekly and discusses such ethical, economic and social questions as are of common interest.

With amusements the people of Fairhope are well supplied. In the summer season the bay, with its ever-joyous sports of fishing, boating and bathing, furnishes delights of which young and old never tire, while the fields with their fragrance, their abundance of flowers and vines, their singing birds and sighing pines, soothe the spirits of the weary with a tenderness that can only be found in nature's ministrations. In other seasons when longer evenings prevail social amusements of all kinds are common, not excepting some efforts in the histrionic line, for Fairhope is fortunate in counting among her residents, along with college graduates, authors and professional men of high standing, those who have won success as professionals before the footlights in the cities of the North. Fairhope is becoming quite popular as a winter resort to Northern people, and a summer home for people of the cities of the South.

Some account should be given of the public utilities with which Fairhope is provided.

One of her first efforts in that line was to provide herself with a wharf. As it was necessary to extend the pier 1,800 feet into the bay it was an enterprise of considerable magnitude to colonists, few in number without funds and forbidden to put an incumbrance upon their holdings. In their extremity they had recourse to what is known as the Guernsey Market House plan and issued certificates receivable for wharf charges. With these sufficient money, labor and material were obtained to construct and equip the pier and wharf at an expense of about \$1,200. These certificates have all been redeemed in the manner contemplated. This was followed by a provision for a water supply for the town. A large windmill and tank have been erected upon the highest elevation, and water is provided free of cost. The village is also provided with a school house sufficient for its present needs, and roads and bridges are being provided as rapidly as possible.

But the most ambitious of her undertakings was the building of a steamer to serve her wants in transporting her products to market at Mobile, some sixteen miles distant on the other side of the bay. Through the kindness of friends funds were provided and placed in the hands of a trustee who built upon Fairhope beach out of Fairhope lumber with Fairhope labor a steamer of 98 tons burden. It is equipped with a triple expansion engine, a pipe boiler and a screw propeller, and is licensed to carry 90 passengers. It makes daily trips to Mobile. The cost of the boat is covered by trustee's certificates which are a lien upon the boat only and provide that its net earnings shall be used to redeem them, after which the boat is to be the property of the association.