

How to Raise Wages.

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE EVENING MEETING OF THE BRADFORD LABOUR CHURCH, JUNE 21ST, 1896, BY L. H. BERENS.

In a previous address on "The A B C of the Land Question," I endeavoured to show the justice of the Single Tax; that is, of a tax on the unimproved value of land irrespective of the income derived from it, of the uses to which it was being put, or of the value of the buildings and other improvements it may contain. In this address I shall devote myself almost exclusively to a consideration of the effects that can confidently be expected from the adoption of such a system of raising public revenues. Englishmen dearly love a precedent; hence, instead of imagining anything revolutionary, let us suppose that when next in office the Liberal Party were to abolish the existing farce of a land tax, and re-impose the old tax of four shillings in the pound of Land Values, *not on the value of the land some three hundred years ago*, but on the value given to land by the demands, the necessities, and the activities of the people of to-day.

Towards such a tax the legal owners of our town lands would contribute whether they had built, or allowed others to build, on their holdings or not; all owners of the mineral lands, whether they had mined or allowed others to mine, on such land or not; all owners of land suitable for gardening, agricultural, pastoral, or other purposes, according to its value irrespective of the uses to which it is being put. Manifestly such a tax would hit our landowners in their weakest spot, viz., their trousers pockets. Those who already were putting their holdings to the best use of which they are capable would pay the tax and, being relieved of other taxation to even a greater proportion, might look pleasant. But the owners of land who are "waiting for the rise" of land held vacant or devoted to inferior purposes, how would they fare? Such a tax would of necessity be a mighty lever to force them to use such land, and, what is even of greater importance, to put it to the best use of which it is capable.

The owners of vacant land in our towns would soon be only too glad to build on it, or to allow others to do so on much more reasonable terms than they demand at present. So, too, the owners of mineral lands would at once be anxious to sink new pits, or to allow others to do so, in order to earn out of the land the tax they would be called upon to pay whether their holdings are in use or not. The same argument applies to land suitable for allotments, horticultural, and other purposes. But to put land to use requires labour; hence this simple means would at once create an increased demand for workers. Those employed in producing wealth from mother earth would require the services of other workers; and so on *ad infinitum*.

Now you can all see what effects this must produce. While ten men are running after one job, there must be unemployed, and there can be no material and general increase in wages. But when ten would-be employers are running after one man, I need hardly say what the result would be. At all events there would be an end of the much-talked-of unemployed difficulty, whilst wages would rise, rise, rise, until what? I shall answer this question more fully later on. Here I would only point out that, as Adam Smith put it many years ago—"The annual labour of every nation is the fund which originally supplies it with all the necessities and conveniences of life which it annually consumes." Hence this annual produce constitutes the natural wage of the workers of the community. More than this they can never get, for there is no source whence it can be derived: and with less, a nation of free men should not rest satisfied. But I think I have now said enough to prove to you that the proper answer to the question, "How to raise wages?" is *Tax Land Values*.

To Land Reformers this answer is conclusive, and the whole matter as clear as the proverbial pike staff. But to make it more clear to the as yet uninitiated, let us further analyse the present position of the workers, and then compare it with what it would be under the system we Single Taxers are endeavouring to establish in every country that claims to be civilised. As already pointed out—in the address on the A B C of the Land Question—all "the necessities

and conveniences of life" are the product, not of one, but of two factors—land and labour. Give to labour access to land, to nature, and he is free and independent, and according to his abilities and the tools at his command, can produce whatever he may desire. But deprive him of it and he is helpless, and can only live on the terms and by the favour of those who control the natural storehouse. And this is practically the position of those generally designated "the working classes" in the so-called civilised communities of to-day.

Being locked-out from the natural outlet of labour, being deprived from access to the natural opportunities, robbed of their fair share of the natural bounties, they have to compete one with the other for permission to work. And it is owing to this most unnatural competition that the wage of the individual worker, whatever may be the value of the commodities he produces, is constantly kept at the lowest standard of living the majority of them will consent to take. I said "whatever may be the value of the commodities he produces," for as all of you know, the labourer in the most fertile fields, the miner in the richest mine, the weaver in the most profitable mill, receives no more than his brother worker toiling on the poorest land, the worst, or in the least profitable mill. The profit of labour accrues to those who toil not neither do they spin, and that entirely owing to the present system, founded by force and maintained by force, of the private ownership of nature.

Some of you may demur at this statement, and ask, "how does the monopoly of nature influence the earnings of the weavers and other industrial operatives?" The answer is a simple one, and one which it would be well for the more skilled workers of the towns constantly to bear in mind. The earnings of the more skilled workers are based on and determined by the earnings of the ordinary unskilled worker. The wages of those employed in mines, mills, railways, etc., are on ultimate analysis determined by the wages of the ordinary unskilled agricultural labourer. For not only is it from their ranks that the competition for employment in the better paid industries is continually maintained, but it is manifest that none would work in mill or mine, or in any other employment for less than he could earn, or than his brother worker is earning, by devoting his industries to the primary industries from mother earth. Hence any measure that would enable these to retain a greater proportion of the wealth their labours call into existence, would also tend to increase the earnings of all their brother workers in other industries; and anything—such as the present monopoly of the natural sources—which reduced their earnings would tend to decrease the earnings of all.

And it is certainly high time that the so-called "capitalist" classes should be taught that the land, the fountain and source of all material blessings, is nature's gift to all her children; that it was to be utilised by all, not to be monopolised—or used as a "means of investment"—by some; that to its use all have equal rights; and that its fruits should be equitably shared by those who assist in the gathering, but by none else. And this much needed lesson the imposition of a substantial tax on Land Values would teach them in a manner not to be mistaken or misunderstood.

Under the system which we Single Taxers aim at establishing in every country which claims to be civilised, the whole rental value of land would be appropriated for the benefit of all to provide the common revenue to be expended for the benefit of all. And as each one of us has to use land, each would contribute to the common revenue in proportion to the value of the land he was utilising.

Under such a system none would willingly own a single acre of land unless he wanted to use it, and, what is perhaps of equal importance, to put it to the best use of which it is capable. Under such a system all would be secured equal opportunities to live, to labour, and to enjoy. The individual earnings of those engaged in producing from mother earth would consist of all due to their industry; and earnings in all other branches of industry could never permanently fall below this; for as soon as it did some of those engaged in it would turn to the natural outlets to industry which at all times

would be open to them. Thus the natural desire to swell the ranks of any industry temporarily more remunerative than the rest, would injure none, but tend to benefit all. For through such competition any advantages accruing from improved methods of production in any one industry would soon be shared by all.

In conclusion I would like to point out that I know of no Single Taxer who would advocate the sudden adoption of this system in its entirety; they know that it can only be adopted gradually; but they also know that every step taken in its direction will tend to permanently alleviate those social evils from which society is now suffering. While its ultimate adoption will render possible a civilisation and social life such as philosophers have aspired to and poets dreamed of.

Single Tax Items.

A Bicycle Company has purchased a site for a manufactory in Manchester at a price of £360,000.

The site upon which the Glasgow University stands cost £81,000 in 1865. It was acquired by a Mr. Boyle in 1800 for £8,500.

The *Newcastle Daily Leader* says, "Wherever the British farmer is not oppressed by legal restrictions landlords exactions, he can, if he is a man worth his calling, still prosper by tilling the soil."

The following resolution was unanimously adopted at the 13th Annual Meeting of the English Land Restoration Union on May 20th, 1896:—"That the proposal in the Agricultural Rating Bill to pay one-half of the rates on agricultural land out of imperial taxation is accompanied by no guarantee that it will even temporarily benefit the working farmer and labourer; is unjust to village ratepayers and to taxpayers in town and country alike; and is in fact an appropriation in aid of two millions of public money for the relief of the landlords who are chief burden upon the agricultural industry."

The Value of Ground in London.

A ground rent of £1,100 per annum, secured on a property in Cornhill, London, facing the Bank of England, has just been sold by auction, realising £42,500. This is at the rate of £2,452,023 per acre.

Economic Conditions in England.

A remarkable condition of affairs exists in England at the present time. Business is improving and wages are rising, while neither rent nor the price of land is rising—in fact, both rent and the selling price of land are falling. What is the explanation of this apparent anomaly? The following item from the April number of *Land and Labour*, the organ of the Land Nationalisation Society, of which Dr. Alfred Russell Wallace, the eminent English scientist, is president, supplies a key to the seeming mystery:—

"The anxiety of the great landlords to evade the coming revolution by getting rid of their land is becoming increasingly evident. The Duke of Devonshire has just parted with a big slice of his real property in Derbyshire. The Duke of Norfolk has decided upon disposing of about 4,000 acres of his Yorkshire estate, which it is said that his tenants will probably acquire. About a year ago Lord Ashburton rid himself of his Somersetshire property, which realised about £120,000, and now his Wiltshire estates are to go the same way."

Heretofore, whenever business began to improve the price of land went up and the landlords hastened to take in the slack by raising their rents. But now that the advanced stage of the agitation for the taxation of ground rents has struck terror into the hearts of the landlords, improvement in business has the just and legitimate effect of improving the condition of labour, and wages rise. Here is a fact for intelligent representatives of American labour to ponder well. Will they do it?—*Joseph Leggett, in the San Francisco Examiner.*

Free land means free men, and until we have the first the last is impossible. This is a law of nature, universal and everlasting. No matter what the condition of man may be, he is governed by the law, and is free only in proportion as the land is to him free. The savage would die if denied access to the land, and the difficulty of his life, such as it is, will be in exact proportion as his free access to land is restricted. It is the same with the civilised man. It matters not how remotely he may be removed from direct connection with land, he is as dependent thereon as the savage.

Go into any agricultural parish you please, and it is ten to one that you will find the majority of the acres owned by individuals who are living far away from that parish. The property is there, and what I contend for is that you shall tax that property for the instruction of those whose labour gives value to that property.—*Richard Cobden.*

READ THE APPEAL TO LAND REFORMERS ON PAGE 4.