

## IS THE PRESENT STATUS OF OUR MOVEMENT SATISFACTORY?

*(An open letter to the Editor and Readers of the Review.)*

By GUSTAVE BÜSCHER.

There have appeared in the last issue of THE REVIEW articles which show that many of our friends are dissatisfied with the present status of the movement. On my travels in the United States I have met many Single Taxers who feel likewise, but give no expression to their sentiment because they cannot explain the reason for this feeling. I must confess that I feel dissatisfied, too. I have been studying personally the movement in Europe and in the United States, and I have seen that it has nowhere the success it deserves to have. There are, of course, differences in degree. In England and Scotland, where the agitation has been carried on on more popular and democratic lines, the status of the movement is by far more satisfactory than in most other countries. But here, too, it is not what we would wish it to be.

I do not mean to say that our movement has not met with a good measure of success. But it has not been, in my judgment, the right kind of success. The movement has a splendid literature, but it has no root in the hearts and minds of the people. And as long as this is so, it is an image with feet of clay. We can never hope to accomplish anything of great importance unless we build differently.

I know full well that there are many reasons which account for this. I know that the masses of the people are slow to move, that the resistance of privilege and prejudice is difficult to overcome, that other and hostile theories have already occupied the field, and that we cannot expect to root them up in a short time. But I have the feeling that all this is not a sufficient explanation for the slow progress of our cause. There is another movement, whose doctrines have been proved erroneous countless times, yet it is still alive and making headway among the people, while our movement which undoubtedly stands for the greatest truth that was ever revealed to mankind, is so slowly progressing that many despair of its success. We cannot explain this merely by saying that the people are too stupid to understand us. I think we must try to find the fault in ourselves. And I hope every earnest Single Taxer will forgive me if I shall say in the following lines something that must hurt our self-love and seem hard to our vanity. For the sake of our cause it is necessary to speak with the utmost frankness.

There is a very dangerous tendency in the Single Tax movement all over the world, in America as well as in Europe, and so far as I can learn from the papers, in Australia, too. It is the tendency of social exclusiveness. Our movement is becoming a movement of well educated, highly cultured people of the middle and upper classes, while in most countries the plain, common people know absolutely nothing of it. It has been said that those people are not intelligent enough to understand the Single Tax. But this is untrue. The result of the last election in England proves that our cause can be made intelligible to the common people. 60 of the 72 members of Parliament whom Scotland sends to the House of Commons, Socialists as well as Liberals, are pledged to support the taxation of land values. Does anybody think this would be possible if the common people in Scotland cared as little as the people elsewhere for the Single Tax? I was told by our friends in Glasgow that when in the speeches of the electoral campaign an allusion was made to the land question, the crowd, the common people, cheered, and sometimes became wild with en-

thusiasm. Surely every Single Taxer will feel that this is the kind of success that is wanted for our cause.

That in other countries our movement progresses so slowly among the working people is only because our leaders do not care sufficiently for the people. We generally address ourselves to those of our own class, to lawyers, business men, clergymen, but seldom to the plain common people. The reason for this is that we like the people of our own class better, that we prefer to speak to people who give us a polite hearing, even if they secretly ridicule our belief, instead of speaking to those who bluntly tell us that we do not interest them if we have no direct message for them.

One of the foremost writers among the American Single Taxers told me that he did not believe the Single Tax would ever succeed as a popular movement. If it will not succeed as a popular movement, it will not succeed at all. The reason for this is obvious.

The middle and upper classes can not give to a social movement the strength necessary to effect great results. The members of these classes are for the most part satisfied with the things as they are and have no interest in changing them. It is impossible to alter this. It would be the first time in history if the majority of the well-to-do-people should show enthusiasm for social progress. And even if we could achieve this, if the bulk of the people remains indifferent, we can never hope to carry our cause to a successful completion. What is to become of the Single Tax if we cannot make it intelligible to the man in the street it is easy to guess. It will remain a plaything of academic and literary circles till they at last, disgusted with useless talking, abandon the cause for another social panacea that promises more immediate results.

Side by side with this dangerous tendency goes our hostility to the most successful rival of the Single Tax, the socialist movement. There are Single Taxers who seem to consider it a merit to treat socialism with the utmost contempt. They seem to think that it is only the stupidity of the working people that accounts for the growth of socialism among them. Nothing could be more erroneous. The true reason is a very different one.

The socialists address themselves exclusively to the working people. But they are telling their readers and hearers very little about the nationalization of the means of production. Where they are doing only this, they are no more successful than we are. They are most successful where they are fighting the cause of the workingman in everyday life, helping him in his struggles, protecting him in his interests. Their papers are full of news of strikes and lock-outs, of the oppression upon tenants by landlords and upon factory workers by harsh monsters, of the exploitation of children and women, in short of all the details of our great social tragedy. The working man who reads their papers feels that these people are taking interest in his affairs, and it is only the natural consequence that he takes an interest in theirs. This is the reason, and I am sure it is the only reason why the socialist movement is successful. Where this feature has been lacking, the socialist movement has failed.

There is much truth in the socialist theory of class-war and class consciousness. It is perfectly true that there is an exploited and an exploiting class. We Single Taxers ought to know it even better than the socialists. We know that every landlord living on his rent is a mere parasite on society and that his economic interests are irreconcilable with those of the toiling masses. Furthermore we know that even those members of the well-to-do class who in a just state of society would be benefactors rather than exploiters of the people, are to-day exploiters of labor, too, because labor is virtually enslaved by land monopoly. And it would be foolish to hope that the majority of those who profit by this state of things will ever give up their social privileges merely for

the sake of justice. Therefore it is utterly hopeless to agitate among the well-to-do people for a radical change of our social system. It is as hopeless as to agitate among slaveholders and slave-merchants for the abolition of slavery.

But this is exactly what Single Taxers generally try to do. They try to interest people of the upper classes in the abolition of land monopoly, *i. e.*, their social privileges, and do not see that they are trying to reconcile the irreconcilable, trying to serve God and Mammon. They say that the slave will never free himself. I must confess that this unhappy saying makes me sometimes doubt the sanity of Single Taxers. If the slave will never free himself we had better give up our fight. For can we hope that the slaveholder will ever free the slave?

This unhappy word proves nothing but the weakness of our faith. To ask ourselves is it possible, is it conceivable that the great question of our cause, the question as to whether all human beings are entitled to an equal share in the bounties of nature, or whether the many are born to serve the few—is it indeed conceivable that this all-important question is to be settled by the speculations of clever scientists or the enactments of benevolent lawmakers without the people taking an interest in it? This question concerns all human beings, and it can only be settled by an appeal to that feeling in human nature that is superior to all theoretical reasoning. And if this feeling is aroused and comes to pronounce its judgment, as it undoubtedly will do in course of time, it will not matter if the wise and learned are with us or against us, if the rich and powerful are our friends or enemies. No matter how strong the forces are that are opposing justice, they must give way. Human nature can bear many things, but it cannot bear the constant burden of clearly recognized wrongdoing.

That we have forgotten this, that we are thinking about Single Tax as something to be achieved by some political miracle, shows only how far we have already gone the wrong way. We have lost the faith in our cause, and we are hoping like somebody who has lost the faith in his own strength for a lucky windfall that will fulfill our hopes, as in some fairy tale. But we shall hope in vain. The Single Tax will never come if we cannot make it the cause of the people. The fact that we are not understood by the common people to-day proves only that we do not feel with the people as we ought to feel.

Our feeling towards the common people is wrong, and this wrong feeling has placed us in a position where we cannot move either forward or backward. The principles of our cause are so simple as to be intelligible to every child of sound understanding. But we are wrangling about economic terms, we are absorbed in the abstruse theories and intellectual subtleties with which a misled and servile science entertains the members of the leisure class. We are getting excited over the playthings of ambitious politicians and we are forgetting the living beings who are travelling together with us through this world of ours. I am afraid to say that the American movement seems to indulge more than any other in these dangerous tendencies. The other day I read in the "*New York American*" that a family on the East Side of Manhattan, whose monthly earnings were between \$20 and \$23, would be compelled to pay \$15 rent a month or to leave the house. I did not find this news in any American Single Tax paper. Was it not a fact worthy to be mentioned in a paper working for the abolition of tenant-slavery? Our English friends have just now issued a pamphlet showing that the royalty which the owner of a coal-mine gets for the mere permission to work the mine exceeds the wages of the firemen on the ship who get less for their dreadful labor than the landlord for doing nothing. Could we not do the same, and for many other categories of workers, too? It would certainly prove more useful than a dozen of clever articles on scientific political questions.

The common people do not care for people with clever theories; they care for people who care for them, and they are right. They are right because the moral feeling, the feeling of mutual sympathy and confidence is a more reliable guide in the maze of life than all theoretical reasoning. We cannot expect the man with an ordinary brain and ten hours' hard, troublesome labor a day to think acutely about all social and political questions. Yet we need this man. We need him more than we need the Emperor of Germany or the President of the United States. And we can only win him by taking interest in him. If we take an interest in him, he at least will know that Single Tax means something for him and that is all that to interest him he needs to know. He will judge of it according to his judgment of us.

A one-sided movement is inevitably doomed to failure. We cannot ask sympathy for our cause without giving sympathy in return. We must not love Single Tax for its own sake; we must love it for the sake of mankind. We have forgotten this. We are talking to the world only of our cause, forgetting that the world has something to say to us of its own troubles. It is nothing but this unconscious selfishness of ours which prevents a more rapid progress of our movement.

There is and there can be no external means by which Single Tax is to be brought about. It is not to be brought about by any skillful scheme of agitation and organization, nor by clever writings and speeches, nor even by the enthusiasm for justice and liberty. Of all these things we have enough everywhere. What we are lacking is nothing but love, love and patience with those for whom we work. Many schemes of organization have been tried and proved futile, clever books are forgotten, enthusiasm passes away, only love lasts. Only a tireless, patient love, a love that does not count on reward, that is willing to bear contempt and adversity, can lead our cause to victory.

There was never uttered a truth more worthy to be cherished in mind by those who wish to spread a new faith than this, by Charles Kingsley: "The older we grow, the more we learn that the spirit of wisdom is the spirit of love—that we must love people if we wish to have any influence upon them." It is very easy to convert somebody to our belief, if we offer our sympathy first, but it is impossible if we arouse animosity.

Is it because the socialists love mankind better than we do that they are more successful than we are? I am afraid this is the truth. They do not try to please the famous and celebrated; they concentrate their work and sympathy upon those who need their help and are indifferent if they are abused and despised by the people of high social standing. This gives their movement a moral strength which is lacking in ours. Whatever their theoretical errors are, their moral feeling is right, and in the world of mankind the influence of the moral feeling is infinitely more powerful than the cleverest and most logical theory.

Let us learn from the good example of the Socialists. Let us beware of the spirit of haughtiness and short-sighted self-love that makes us look with contempt on these people who do not see the truth as we would wish them to see it. We have no right to despise anybody who works in good faith. We might much rather exhibit contempt for those who for the sake of their social standing silently betray the truth which they loudly proclaim.

Let us look at the example of our great master. As a theorist, Henry George was not greater than many before him. There were perhaps theorists more acute in some details than he. Yet Henry George has moved thousands where others have converted only hundreds. In reading his works we feel that he takes a deeper interest than usual in the affairs of mankind, that our joys and troubles are his joys and troubles, and this gives his lightest word a con-

vincing power that is often lacking in the most brilliant logical deduction. Henry George was great because his love for mankind was great and kindled love in return in minds who would never have listened to any theoretical reasoning. If we fail to follow him in this, then we shall have the latter without the spirit, our efforts will be in vain and our work will be taken up by others more worthy of the task.

I think I have said enough to point out where in my opinion the fault is to be found. I have not said it with the clearness and force I wished to give it. Still I hope to be understood by those who feel in this matter as I feel. It is hardly necessary to say that I do not mean to blame anybody. I only wish to give an explanation of a problem that must have perplexed many who have been working for a cause that is as dear to me as to them.

It is as certain as a mathematical axiom that our cause is good and true, and must win in the long run. The question is only if we are in earnest in the cause, if we can, for the sake of our cause, sacrifice not only money and time, but also our bad feelings, our prejudices and our vanity. If we cannot do this, then we are merely playing with fine words and sounding phrases are deceiving ourselves. However clear our theoretical conceptions are, they will be of no avail if we cannot live up to our ideals in every method of propaganda that we adopt.



### REPLY BY THE EDITOR.

We print the foregoing article by Mr. Büscher, not because we are able to endorse every line of it, but because it is in many respects an important and valuable criticism of the movement. We cannot take the pessimistic view of the progress of the cause that Mr. Büscher does; considering all that the Single Tax means—its far reaching and revolutionary character—the advances it is making are not such as to discourage us, and if not all that could be desired, are everywhere to be discerned.

Nevertheless, our contributor, who has had exceptional opportunities for observation, seems to us correct in his contention that our agitation should occupy a higher plane, and that we fall short of our opportunities by failing to remember the call to human sympathy that is so great a part of the message we bring. Something of the old spirit of the Anti-Poverty days we have certainly lost—and we are not of those who think the movement is a gainer by the loss. Undoubtedly the tone of our agitation is in some respects saner and quieter—but there is less, too, of that sympathy which attracts, and which Mr. Büscher is right in believing makes converts more rapidly than logical demonstrations. In this respect, if in no other, the article of our contributor is deserving of more than passing consideration.

Some of the minor points which our author makes are no doubt open to question. Of such is the assumption that the comfortable classes—whose social standing may be dependent more or less upon the servile condition of labor—are of necessity impervious to our appeal. The erroneous nature of this assumption is easily proven by the fact that the workers in the Single Tax movement have been drawn from all classes regardless of social position. Nor is it true that “the middle and upper classes are satisfied with things as they are.” Such a sweeping statement must call into question the impartiality of our critic. For it cannot be said with entire truth of the upper classes, and surely not of the middle classes, from whose ranks the vast majority of Single Taxers have been drawn.