

THE LAND QUESTION: A WOMAN'S SYMPOSIUM.

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II. SOCIALISM AND INDIVIDUALISM HARMONIZED. Alton A A. Chapman.

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In Bellamy's "Looking Backward," which was the first reform book to fall into my hands, after my eyes were fairly opened to our real economic conditions, which offered any way out of the cruel dilemma, and which I welcomed with delight and still read with pleasure, he lays down the true and heavenly principle upon which society should undoubtedly be constructed, and which if carried out in the spirit as well as the letter would give us a veritable heaven upon earth; but if earth be not ready to receive it and will have none of it, what then? We must find some powerful lever to lift earth up within reach of these heavenly influences, so that it may lay hold of them and abide by them. What is most needed, it seems to me, is not additional imperfect human legislation — we have too much of that already — but rather some essential principle of equal justice which, like all the laws of nature, may be safely trusted to execute itself, *if given free play*, regardless of the ignorance or indifference of careless, blundering humanity.

Now the single tax is such a principle and such a law, which constitutes at once its practicability and its unfailing charm. Being at the same time both individualistic and socialistic, it ignores the claims of neither, but does equal, impartial justice both to the individual and to society. Those who approach it from the individualistic side are more apt to dwell upon that feature of it; those who, like myself, have approached it through socialism, find in its socialistic quality its greatest attraction. Being thus many-sided, it is adapted to all classes of minds. As an ethical principle it appeals with irresistible force to the moral nature, while the coldest and most shrewdly calculating can appreciate its financial soundness and expediency as a business measure. This explains its rapid growth and shows how many more chances it has for general acceptance and speedy realization than any other method of relief.

That Nationalists and other socialists doubt the efficacy of the single tax to provide work for *all* men arises from the fact that they do not clearly grasp all that is implied in the economic term "land," and fail to realize the far-reaching effect of a tax on land *value*. Nature has already provided work for all men, by implanting in each certain imperative wants that can only be satisfied by labor of some sort, and the degree to which these may be met will depend upon man's freedom of access not only to land, but to *valuable* land; and land becomes valuable just in

proportion as it carries with it the power of free and effective *cooperation* of man with his fellow-man. Not only "In union there is strength," but in union of productive forces there is *value* — land value — which has no existence without it. So here we get a glimpse of the socialism of the single tax.

Competition is, in truth, a selfish principle; but given free play, it forms the most effective check to that other selfish principle, *monopoly*. The trouble is, we are not living under free competition today, but under a fettered, forced and wholly *unnatural* competition.

It is equally idle to inveigh against cooperation, as if it did not already exist, or were dependent upon legislation for its continuance, since it is inseparable from even the lowest form of civilization. Only the hermit or the most primitive savage is or can be an absolute individualist, economically speaking. For the first step from savagery to civilization is by cooperation, and the measure of man's civilization is the measure of his cooperation, and *vice versa*; so that in the highest forms of civilization we find the most complete interdependence of man and man. But as the most highly organized society is made up, after all, of individual members, so, on the other hand, a full-orbed human life, with the fullest satisfaction of its varied wants (as well as the accomplishment of any public reform), is possible only by incorporation and cooperation with society as a whole.

The single tax philosophy is based upon the principle that as society is but the greater man, its rights, privileges and duties are derived only from those of the individual unit, upon which they are based and of which they are the extension; wherefore a wrong done to one of the least of these is done at the peril of the whole social body, justice to the community being incompatible with injustice to the individual.

When it is claimed for the single tax that it would enable the laborer to get on the land and work for himself, nine people out of ten think only of *farm land* and of the conditions under which small farming is carried on today, and straightway imagine the poor laborer leading a comparatively isolated life of coarse drudgery, cut off from many of the benefits and refinements of civilization, and more or less limited to his individual resources for the supply of his wants, thereby getting but a scanty return for much hard toil. But such people forget that *valuable land* being the costliest to hold out of use under the single tax, would be the first to be freed from the grasp of mere speculative ownership — that the opportunities offered by the high-priced city lot or the valuable copper and coal mines and timber forests would be available to all who desired to utilize them, even earlier than would the broad farming lands that lie more remote from the centres of effective cooperation.

In hundreds of manufacturing towns today the crying need is for neat, commodious, low-priced houses for the working classes. The land is there in abundance and convenient of access, builders are there who have both the skill and the will to erect such houses; but the landlord is there, too, and without his consent nothing can be done, and in the majority of cases nothing is done. So mill operatives continue to live in crowded, unwholesome tenements, while carpenters and masons remain idle, and dealers in building materials complain of dull times.

Coal barons could no longer fix the price of coal to suit themselves, when heavy taxes would make it ruinous to hold coal fields idle; they must either increase their output, thereby employing more labor, or yield up their unused or half-used opportunities to eager rivals whose brisk competition would speedily bring prices down to the normal level. Hundreds of copper miners are idle because the heavy royalties which must be paid to the *owners* for permission to work the mines, make it impossible to produce at a living profit.

All this and much more the single tax would permanently cure. Hundreds of instances in all departments of human effort could be adduced to show how the single tax would liberate enterprise and set all the wheels of industry in motion. For it must be remembered that it is *opportunity to satisfy wants* which the single tax furnishes for all by giving to all *equal access to the natural source of supply* — not *work*, merely, which none of us particularly desire and which we are all seeking to avoid through labor-saving devices.

It is an error to suppose that society is an artificial product, to be governed by artificial or man-made laws. The social organism is as much the creation of God as is the individual human body, to which it so closely and beautifully corresponds; the laws of its well-being are incorporated into its very structure and can be as safely trusted to execute themselves as the laws of gravitation or chemical attraction. What we need to do, it seems to me, is *not* to attempt to legislate ourselves into the kingdom of heaven by our own devices, but rather, diligently to seek after those eternal laws of justice and equity that God has already enacted, and take heed that no statute of ours shall hamper their free and effective operation. The single tax, being in the nature of such an effort, seems to me the shortest and by far the surest way out of our social and economic difficulties.

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