

## CONCERNING SINGLE TAXERS AND SOCIALISTS.

## A WORD TO SINGLE TAXERS.

*(For the Review)*

By GRACE ISABEL COLBRON.

There is no love lost between a Single Taxer and a socialist. Whenever the twain do meet there is a baiting and debating, an argument and counter-argument. And as a rule, they part each convinced as firmly as ever that he alone sees the Truth. Among Single Taxers there is a charming unanimity of opinion concerning all the many grades of socialists. They are all dumped together as useless. But the many grades of socialists harbor many and varied opinions concerning Single Taxers. From the gentle comradeship of the mild Fabian, with his heartfelt desire to do some good in the world and his vagueness as to just how it is to be done, to the outspoken contempt of the fighting social-democrat for what he terms the wishy-washyness of Single Taxers, there are many degrees of feeling. But almost any degree among them leads to a quarrel, if occasion offers. Those who quarrel for their opinions at least *have* some opinion to quarrel for. And the stronger the belief the more ready is the believer to fight for it. A socialist who thoroughly understands the doctrine in which he believes (I am speaking now of the Marxist socialist, the only kind who has ever accomplished anything in practical politics or public affairs), a socialist who knows what he believes, and why he believes it, and a Single Taxer who also knows what he believes and why he believes it, naturally find their opinions on many subjects absolutely at variance. And each is eager to convince the other, more so than to convince the conservative, because of the very reason that should make them careful how and when they quarrel;—for the reason namely that each knows that the other believes as he does in a certain fundamental truth, and that the difference lies merely in the method of settling a problem which each believes the all important one in the world's life to-day. And it is concerning this very point that I would like to preach a little sermon to both Single Taxers and socialists, but principally to Single Taxers and beg their attention and tolerance. Fight as much as you please, dear brothers, in the one great love of justice on earth. A wholesome quarrel is good for the soul. But never fight in the presence of conservatives; never let conservatives forget that, quibble as you may about minor points, you are one against *them* in that you believe in justice and they do not. Single Taxers and socialists are both radical, and therefore, different as may be their proposed methods of obtaining justice, it is justice that they both seek. Both Single Taxer and socialist start from the idea gained by each through studying life and its problems, that it is not right or just that one-fourth of humanity should live on the labor of the other three-fourths, denying to the other three-fourths all the very first essentials of a decent human existence. The socialist says that a better state of things is to be brought about thus and so. We Single Taxers call his proposition a fallacy, and know that we have discovered a far better remedy, because it is a simpler and more fundamental one. But we must never forget that, wrong as his ideas may seem to us, our socialist is seeking the remedy as we are; in other words, he has seen the wrong as we have, and he wants to remedy it as sincerely as we do. We may look out of widely differing windows, but we have both seen the same Great Light.

Why do we desire the Single Tax? Surely not because some few of us want our personal property taxes reduced, or because we want some millionaires to stop lying about the furniture and jewels they own. We want Single

Tax because we believe that it will bring about a better distribution of wealth; in concrete terms, because we believe that it will stop the spread of heart-rending, embruting and embittering poverty, the gradual degradation of an entire class of human beings. And for this same reason does the socialist preach the common ownership of tools of production; for this same reason does he preach his paternalism that as it seems to us, would bind freedom hand and foot. It is a fallacy, we think, but he believes it the only way to bring about juster saner, healthier conditions. And when he thinks about it, he sees that it is the same with us. In fact the socialist knows this, and his attitude towards us, when it comes to a fronting towards the common enemy, is saner than ours, more sensible and honest, more practical if you will.

This common enemy is the great mass of those who, for want of a more definite word, I will call "conservatives." The great mass of those who do not believe that present conditions of wealth and poverty are wrong; the great mass of those who batten on present conditions and therefore fight against change, or else being kind by nature, grieve over conditions, but accept them piously as "the will of the God." This to me is the meaning of the words:—radical and conservative. The radical believes in fundamental justice, and does not consider present conditions just. The conservative does *not* understand the idea of fundamental justice and considers present conditions sad, perhaps, but all right and proper as they are. He does not see how they can be altered, and when they sadden him, he gives charity. He sometimes even considers it impious to suggest that a change might be possible, and he cites the Saviour's words, "The poor ye have always with you," as a facer for the venturesome radical who endeavors to tell him that all the misery rife in the world to-day is not the will of the God, but the fault of man.

These are the two great divisions of mankind to-day, as Ella Wheeler Willcox puts it, "Those who lift and those who lean." Now the Single Taxer and the socialist are both "lifters" and they should never, for the sake of the great Belief which is at the heart of the theories each fights for, let those who "lean" hear them quarrel. For it gives the conscious conservative, he who deliberately uses present conditions to his own advantage, it gives him a chance to treat them both with contempt and to discredit their teachings in the eyes of the uncertain-minded. And it discourages those who have been 'leaning' and would like to 'lift.' I am a convinced and ardent Single Taxer, and I am also convinced that the doctrine of common property in the tools of production is an absurd fallacy, but if I cannot make a Single Taxer out of a conservative, I would much rather see him become a socialist than remain a conservative. For when he becomes a socialist he is at least a "lifter." He is one less of those who believe that things are right as they are, and that the present shameless exploitation of labor and manifold economic oppression is the will of God. It does not matter so much to me through what window he sees the Truth, providing he does see it. He is then much more my friend than before he saw it.

The conservative is much more far-sighted in this matter than are some radicals. He classes Single Taxers, social-democrats, Fabians, anarchists, scientific or practical, all together under the general term of "socialist." For "socialist" in his eyes is any being who dares to assert that things are not right as they are, and they might and can be changed. He considers them all "cranks," and he pays the social-democrats the compliment of considering them dangerous cranks, whereas, I am sorry to say, he usually classes Single Taxers among the "harmless cranks." This is not good, and Single Taxers themselves have been to blame for it. They have sometimes, more times than I would like to admit, thrown opprobrium on the socialist when talking to a conservative, in the hope of winning the latter. They say, "Oh, we are not like those mad socialists, we are nice respectable people whom one could know socially,

and we merely wanted to bring about a better form of taxation, so that you won't have to lie about your piano or your diamonds." Of course this is an exaggerated case, but are there not many Single Taxers, particularly women, who believe in this method of propaganda? Every man to his taste. Any way of working for the good is good. But I am afraid the Single Taxers won in this way are not those who help on the cause much and they certainly are not those who understand what Henry George really meant.

The socialists are wiser than we in this. They lose no opportunity, when alone with us, of telling us how foolish we are. But they understand that we are radicals as they are, and they are careful what they say about us, when there are conservatives present. They don't do this from any consideration for us, but merely from reasons of practical politics.

Now all I ask of Single Taxers regarding this matter of the socialists is this. When talking with a conservative and trying to interest him in Single Tax, you will often hear him exclaim, when you have reached a certain point in your preaching, "Oh I see, then you are a socialist?" Now, don't reply indignantly that you are not, and don't inveigh against the socialists as quite impossible people. This may set your new convert's mind at rest, but the sort of Single Taxer he will become won't be much worth having. Explain to him that you are not a socialist but a radical; that socialists are merely one sort of radical, whereas you are another sort, and that you have a better form of radical doctrine that you know to be far better than socialism. But unless you explain to him this fundamental resemblance between yourself and the socialist, you will never make him understand rightly where you differ. Also, he will not understand where you differ from him, and he will think you are merely telling him—or trying to tell him—something about taxation. He may either not be interested in taxation, or he may know more about it than you do. Make your convert a radical before you make him a Single Taxer. Let him think for five or ten minutes that you are a socialist, if you can't do it any other way. For in the next ten minutes he may begin to understand Single Tax better, and then you have a convert worth the trouble. The reason why Single Tax is supposed to be hard to explain and understand is because so many Single Taxers try to make their converts Single Taxers before they are radicals, usually because radicalism is a discredited and misunderstood word. It is like trying to make a Presbyterian out of a Jew before you make a Christian of him.

Of course there is a lot that can be done for Single Tax without making open converts. But if you want to make converts, it is always best to explain the matter clearly to them first. You can step in when a socialist has been talking for half an hour; you can say yes and amen to all his arguments thus far, and then you can talk Single Tax and make converts. But to talk Single Tax straight out at first to a conservative is a thankless and trying task. For my part, I'd rather catch those the socialists have been hammering for a while, and then, when they understand something of justice, I can show them that Single Tax alone is a satisfactory method of bringing about justice. You see the socialist doesn't begin by talking about "tools of production," he talks poverty and distress, in other words, he tries to make a radical of his convert before he makes a social-democrat of him. Learn from the enemy who is really our brother, though differing in doctrinism . . . and remember, doctrinism is not *Belief* . . . adopt his methods of propaganda and you will soon learn how valuable he can become as a helper for the cause he does not believe in (I mean the doctrine) for he shares with us our *Belief* in Justice.

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Henry George was the Newton of political Science.—*Rev. Herbert Bigelow.*