

THE CALIFORNIA SITUATION

A Word to Friends From a Friend

The Los Angeles Single Tax League has decided to devote its whole energy to a campaign of organized education and preparation, before again resorting to the ballot. As the Great Adventure group has announced its purpose of circulating petitions to put the measure on the ballot this year, an explanation of the situation is due to those Single Taxers throughout the country who have been so generous with their support.

When men differ as to methods of establishing a principle there is sometimes a temptation to charge bad faith, and to drift into criminations and recriminations. But such a course leads to no good end. It is easy to apply epithets, but epithets mean mischief. We are interested, not in citing some one as the cause of past failures, but in finding the way to future success.

Let it be said in the very beginning, then, that no question of orthodoxy or good faith is involved. It is all a matter

of method or procedure. Ten years' experience in California, and five State elections, have shown that the ballot method has not led to the results expected; nor has it secured results in proportion to the time and money expended. Not only has the vote not materially increased in the ten years, but these repeated campaigns—without the necessary educational work—have resulted in organized opposition, and have led to needless antagonism on the part of many people who were called upon to vote before they understood the reason.

This opposition is not against the Singletax as it is; it is against what the press that reaches nine-tenths of the people represents it to be. The voters are worse than uninformed; they are misinformed. It will take time and labor to disabuse their minds of this error.

It was thought by some Singletaxers that the mere putting of the name "Singletax" on the ballot, accompanied by a brief description in a public document, would familiarize the voters with the subject. Experience has shown this to be a fallacy. Election returns indicate that either the voters still do not understand the question, or, understanding it, do not want the Singletax. And every Singletaxer of

experience knows that it is rare indeed that a man or woman who really understands the Singletax fails to accept it.

The fact is, voters read and discuss what interests them. On questions that do not interest them they vote "no," without troubling themselves to understand them. Until they are interested in the Singletax they are quite willing to accept our opponents' statements, which may include anything from Bolshevism and communism to anarchy and I. W. W.-ism. Unfortunately, such phrases as "land owners are robbers," "freeing the land," "restoring the land to the people," "private property in land is robbery," and similar words used by over-zealous persons, have been seized upon by our opponents to prejudice the uninformed public. The slogan, "To free the land, and share the resources of the Golden State," is innocent enough to the mind of the Singletaxer; but to the farmers and home owners to whom it comes for the first time it awakens visions of Soviet Russia. Such phrases were always open to a wrong interpretation, but since the communistic regime in Russia, they have been used to stamp the Singletax as a means of taking farms and homes away from the people. The Anti-Single Tax League, and nine-tenths of the press, have fostered this idea

until they have closed the minds of a vast majority of the people.

To break down this unfortunate prejudice will require patient and careful work. It cannot be done by a "hurrah" campaign. The people cannot be stampeded by emotionalism into "voting away their homes." It is not a question of putting a Singletax measure on the ballot. Any question can be put on the ballot by the use of money to pay professional name-canvassers. The problem is to get the votes after the measure is on the ballot. Only an intelligent, home-conservation campaign of education will remove the unjust stigma attaching to our cause. When the voters feel themselves reassured that the Singletax will not disturb their title to land or other property in any way, shape, or manner, the measure can be put on the ballot and carried.

When the successful measure is drafted it will in all probability be found to accord more nearly with present modes of thought and habits of business of the people of the State. We must speak the language of the workaday world; and we must go with, not counter to, the current of affairs. Perhaps one per cent of the people are thinking and talking land reform. One hundred per cent are think-

ing and talking taxation. To the public at large ours should not be made a land question at all, but a tax question. Establish just taxation, and the land question will automatically adjust itself.

Pittsburgh is removing taxes from improvements at the rate of ten per cent every three years. New York City has exempted new residences from taxes for ten years. New Jersey has made the same exemption for five years. Toronto votes next fall on a measure to remove taxes from improvements at the rate of ten per cent a year. These measures may seem slow to the enthusiast, but they are getting results; while the swifter way attempted in California has not made a beginning, and will—if continued—actually delay the movement.

That this action of the Los Angeles Single Tax League has not been taken without the most careful consideration of all the factors involved is evident from the cordial approval of Louis F. Post, John Z. White, James R. Brown, J. W. Bengough, George Foster Peabody, E. B. Swinney, Bolton Smith, Otto Cullman, James A. Bell, Jackson H. Ralston, James H. McGill, Mrs. Mary Fels, and others in the east who have given time and money to the cause. And the same enthusiastic

endorsement has come from such California Singletaxers as James H. Barry, Wm. G. Eggleston, C. E. Todd, Frank D. Butler, E. P. E. Troy, and Mrs. Anna George de Mille.

In conclusion, let it be said that the Los Angeles Single Tax League questions no one's motives. Nor does it condemn those who choose a different course. Each must act according to his light. The League has set its hand to the work that promises the greatest and quickest results in sane and just taxation, and invites the co-operation of all like-minded persons. The course chosen is less spectacular, but it will get results. As the overhead expenses of the League are met by a few local members, any additional contributions will go directly into the educational work. California is still the best State for the right kind of Singletax work. This work will go on regardless of who aids or hinders; it will go on faster with your aid.

STOUGHTON COOLEY,
Manager, Los Angeles Single Tax
League.

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