

# The Emotional or The Rational Plea

Under this title which Mr. Cooley has chosen he sets forth his views on the California situation. We print this communication in full, because it presents the other side. But we are now on the ballot in California, and with this article of Mr. Cooley's the controversy on the situation in that State must close.—EDITOR SINGLE TAX REVIEW.

**F**EW persons can read Mr. Miller's article in the May-June REVIEW, "The Single Tax is more than a Fiscal Reform," without a feeling of admiration for the writer's skill in marshalling words to express his ideas. As a plea for the emotional in propaganda it can be set down as one of the finest things in recent days. Those who believe in other methods feel its force; while the emotionally inclined will find it hard to resist.

But when this has been said, the question arises, Then what? The response by Single Taxers to this eloquent plea, like the response of non-Single Taxers, will depend upon the relative number of emotional and practical people. What that proportion is we can only guess. If voting be an indication the number cannot safely be placed at more than four or five persons in a hundred.

The question of principle is not involved. Our differences are entirely a matter of procedure. We are agreed as to what we want; we differ only as to how to get it. Shall we make our chief plea to that small number of men and women who are dominated by their emotions; or shall we appeal to the great mass who are practical minded first, and idealists afterward?

Has not confusion come to the minds of some of our people through mistakingly thinking the Single Tax analogous to the anti-slavery movement? Emotionalism played an important part in that great crusade. Why, they ask, may it not take the leading place in the Single Tax campaign?

A full understanding of the anti-slavery movement gives its own answer. It was, indeed, an appeal to the emotional. The plea was made with fervor, nay, with passion; and not infrequently speakers lost themselves in an ecstatic frenzy of imprecations and denunciations. Its immediate object was attained, but at a stupendous cost to whites and blacks alike. The nation was divided, civil war ensued, and the bitterest race question that has cursed any people has come down to our day, and bids fair to last indefinitely.

There is no desire to question in the slightest degree the sincerity, the great-heartedness, of the noble men and women who waged that contest. Their zeal is one of the precious heritages of our country, and their achievement has passed into history. But in the light of later years we can see that their work could have been done in a different way. The economic phase could have been set forth. Slave owners could have been shown that free labor was cheaper than slave labor. The whole country might have borne the cost of manumission, as Great Britain did. Or a compromise might have been effected, as in Brazil. Neither of which cases resulted in such a race question as we have; and both were far less in money cost than the

Civil War, to say nothing of the loss of life, and the bitterness that followed.

But aside from these and many other reasons, the methods of the Abolitionists are inapplicable to the Single Tax problem because conditions and circumstances are entirely different. On the slavery question the country was half slave and half free. The impassioned eloquence of Garrison and Parker and Beecher was not heard by slaves or slave-owners. Their pleas were made to free men, a long, long way from slave territory. But in the present instance the country is all slave, that is to say, the land question extends throughout the nation, and the world. There is no free territory in which a man can stand and denounce to his fellows the sins of offenders in bound territory. If all the landowners were in one part of the country, and the non-landowners in another part, the passionate appeals and denunciations might find the response they did 80 years ago. But our appeals must be made to the victim and the beneficiary alike. We must, to be effective, make the plea for the Single Tax that the Abolitionists would have made for the slave in Charleston or New Orleans.

It is conceivable that zealous men and women might bring such eloquence to their aid that they could so set class against class that a revolution would result, and the nationalization of the land be brought about by a stroke of the pen, as was the case with slavery. But if that were done it would leave a legacy of hatred, and a conflict of interests compared with which the Civil War passions would pale. And the subsequent opposition of the former land owners would for years thwart all efforts at reconstruction.

In a country where a few idlers have all the wealth, and the workers have nothing, a revolution is possible; but where ownership of property is widely distributed changes must be guided by reason. The French Revolution and the Russian Revolution would be inconceivable in England or in this country.

The columns of the REVIEW are not the place for criminations and recriminations. Nor yet are they the place for frenzied appeals or impassioned denunciations. Rather should here appear careful reasoning and sober judgment. It is not for Single Taxers to indulge in dreams and fancies, but to accept a plain workaday world for what it is, and make the most of it.

We can shout and beat the air until the public looks upon us as fanatics and impracticables; or we can speak the language of the everyday world, and make the truth understandable to the mass of the people. When Russians, before the revolution, wanted political favors they used arguments that were likely to convince the Czar. When we want political action we also must convince our ruler, the majority of the voters. How shall we address them? Shall we tell them their social and economic ills can be cured only by a revolution? Or shall we say: "Your ills are due to a slight maladjustment in your fiscal relations. You are all right in the main. Your ways have been proven by the test of time. No general upsetting of institutions is neces-

sary. All that is needed is a slight change in the tax laws, a change already foreshadowed in the present laws. You now exempt personal property and improvements from taxes for such government services as street pavements, drainage, and various other improvements that increase the value of land and not of labor products. Just extend that exemption, as fast as you can adjust yourself, to all other taxes for the same reason, because all government services increase the value of land only and not of labor products."

We can nominate a candidate for mayor in a city of six million population, and poll 454 votes. Or we can unite with our fellow citizens, Republicans and Democrats, and secure a ten-year tax exemption for new dwellings in that city. We can have a handful of votes for State officers in Pennsylvania; or we can reduce the tax on improvements in Pittsburgh ten per cent. every three years. Which?

This appeal to reason is of universal application, but it applies with peculiar force at this time to the California situation. The movement that put home rule in taxation on the ballot in 1912 was an appeal to the average man.

It appealed to his common sense, and his sense of justice and fair play. The vote was 169,321 for, and 243,959 against. In 1914 the home rule measure polled 267,618 for, and 375,634 against. Then the leadership changed to men of the emotional nature, men who saw children starving and denounced landowners as murderers. They retained, in the 1916 election, 260,332 of the former affirmative votes, but aroused 576,533 votes in opposition. In 1918 the vote was 118,088 for, and 260,334 against; and in 1920 it was 196,694 for, and 563,503 against. That is, the percentage of the affirmative vote was 40 in 1912; 41½ in 1914; 31 in 1916; 31 in 1918; and 26 in 1920.

There was a reason. That result was not without a cause. A truth shines the brighter the harder it is pounded; but a truth may be so entangled with lies as to be mistaken for a lie. The Single Tax in the hands of rational men and women won friends. And the more it was hammered the more friends it made. But when the Single Tax in California came under the direction of revolutionists, who hailed it as a revolutionary measure, and boasted that it would bring about a revolution, the people of California turned away from it because of its sponsors. The chief spokesman was fond of giving voice to such expressions as that in his editorial on Russia. After extolling the liberation of the "semi-starved slaves" from their masters by taking possession of "their natural resources and also their industries," he concluded with, "That is what we are striving to do in California, but we won't stop there; the tide is too strong."

Is it any wonder the vote fell off? Such tactics brought the reds, the I.W.W.'s, and the Bolshevists trooping into the party; but they drove out those who believe in rational methods, and solidified public opinion in opposition to Single Tax ideas.

It was to allay this opposition, and remove the misunderstanding on which it was based that the Los Angeles Single

Tax League, and many leading Single Taxers throughout the State acting with it, decided not to put a measure on the ballot this year. A few Californians did not agree with this program, but they finally yielded; and there would have been no measure on the ballot had it not been for the action of the Committee of the East, which, mistaking lack of money as the chief reason for our action, took it upon itself in opposition to the expressed desires of the Single Taxers on the ground, to finance a campaign.

Money is an important item in such work. But it is not the only thing. Nor is it the principal thing. Circumstances and conditions have their bearing. Owing to past indiscretions of leaders, and the presence of so many reds, the people of the State are not thinking of the Single Tax as a change in methods of taxation, but as a revolution similar to that in Russia. A San Francisco paper has been carrying a conspicuous advertisement calling upon "comrades" for help for the "Red Single Tax Amendment," which polled "267,000 working class votes in 1916."

Into this delicate situation the Committee of the East, knowing nothing of the local conditions, has plunged headlong. With the voters already "seeing red," an amendment is offered that lends itself to this interpretation more than any that has gone before. It would be difficult to conceive a wording that would lend itself to more misinterpretation, or be more objectionable as a legal measure.

What a situation! It is in the last degree deplorable. Much work has been done in California. If the situation had been rightly handled the Single Tax even now would be on the statute books. But it has lost much ground in the last few years, and this loss will be doubled if the present measure goes on the ballot.

We have protested in vain. But we cannot allow a good cause to be sacrificed through a blunder. We must continue to protest against this desecration of a great idea. We must make plain to Californians that the real Single Tax idea is a sane and simple tax measure that not only is not revolutionary, but is the one measure that will conserve property rights, and put an end to the so-called class struggle that is apparently on the point of violent outbreaks. We must continue to point out to the people the sharp distinction between the rational method of establishing just taxation, and the revolutionary method about to go on the ballot.

This course is imperative in California at this time if the Single Tax principle is to receive the thoughtful attention of the voters. If it is to find favor the principle must be expressed in a law drawn in conformity with prevailing ideas, and in accord with established institutions. To attempt to jam down the throats of the people willy nilly a revolutionary measure that will upset business and bring on a panic, not only cannot succeed, but it will add to the present prejudice against the idea, and make it harder for any measure to succeed. The Los Angeles Single Tax League stands firmly for just taxation by rational means in spite of the mistaken policy of the Committee of the East.

STOUGHTON COOLEY.

## Reply by The Editor

MANY of the points raised by Mr. Cooley have been answered in the article in our last issue which he criticises and which we ask our readers to consider in connection with his letter. Our article was not an appeal to emotionalism (and in this Mr. Cooley begs the question), but an appeal to those who believe in Henry George's message to tell that message in its fulness to the world at large, and not to waste time and energy in talks about taxes. That issue is a fundamental one, and it *does* involve a question of principle. It is not merely a difference in method, as Mr. Cooley tries to make it appear. Our position is again stated in this issue of the REVIEW in an article entitled "Land Tenure or Tax Reform," which was in type before Mr. Cooley's letter was received.

We may observe in passing, however, that Mr. Cooley's discovery that 95 per cent. of the human race are ruled by reason and only 5 per cent. respond to emotional appeals, is "important if true," but most students of sociology have come with more or less sadness to the opposite conclusion.

Mr. Cooley's letter shows precisely the result of that fiscal presentation of the Single Tax against which we have been protesting. The outsider would not learn from its perusal that there was a land question upon the correct solution of which our whole civilization depends; nor is the name of Henry George mentioned. We are told that if it had not been for the "revolutionists" who insisted upon mentioning the unpleasant fact that land monopoly was responsible for poverty, the Single Tax would have been adopted in California before now! Perhaps Mr. Cooley expects us to believe, also, that if Henry George had refrained from writing "Progress and Poverty" the Single Tax would have been adopted throughout the United States before the close of the last century!

Mr. Cooley cites the large vote for a "home rule in taxation" amendment and the somewhat smaller vote for a subsequent Single Tax amendment, as though this justified keeping silent about the full implications of the Single Tax. He seems to forget that in 1910, as a result of the expenditure of thousands of dollars by Single Taxers, a "home rule in taxation" amendment was actually carried in Oregon and made part of the constitution, and that at the very next election when the people knew what it portended, it was promptly repealed by popular vote. So "it doesn't mean anything" just to get votes when people do not realize what they are voting for.

We thought that the modern witchfinding hysteria had run its course, when even a member of the present cabinet could observe that "some people see 'Reds' whenever a few girls walk down the street with red hats on." We leave Mr. Cooley's charges to the oblivion they will soon find, pointing out, however, that neither in the text of the amendment now proposed, nor in the last one voted on, is there anything mentioned but the Single Tax; that is, both amendments propose nothing except to abolish all present

taxes save that on land values, and to increase the latter so as to take the rent of land for public purposes.

With reference to party action, we do not have to choose, as Mr. Cooley implies, between running candidates and accepting exemptions of buildings. Both can happen coincidentally. We notice that our Republican and Democratic friends referred to, who united to exempt new buildings in New York, did not let this trifle stop them from talking their particular doctrines and running full tickets, and why should Single Taxers be more bashful than they? But if a choice had to be made, and such reforms as exemptions on old or new buildings could only be had by keeping silent about Equal Rights to the Use of the Earth, why of course we stand for preaching the full gospel.

We realize that the Single Tax may come gradually, and therefore are not averse to accepting, heralding and even welcoming any steps taken towards the goal. But this does not mean that the goal should never be mentioned for fear of impeding the steps. As a practical matter, the very best way to hasten the taking of these steps is to hold the goal constantly up to view.

Of what use is it, anyway, to work for a better tax system that stops short of taking all the rent of land? Its chief result would be, like any other improvement in conditions, to make land more valuable and increase the tribute paid to landowners. And we may be sure that any change in the tax system that does propose to take ALL the rent of land and thereby deprive the landowners of ALL the income they derive as landowners, will be fought just as hard by them if we try to sugarcoat it as a "slight readjustment of our fiscal system" as it will if we tell the truth and call it the establishment of the equal right of all men to the earth.

It is no mere coincidence that men to whom the Single Tax means as little as it seems to Mr. Cooley should also be a unit in their opposition to all political expression for the Single Tax. *In this they are right.* There is nothing in the mere shifting of taxation from one thing to another that affords a political or economic philosophy, and therefore the Single Tax put in that way is politically innocuous. As well think of forming a political party based on the kind and quality of city pavement, or improved methods of public accounting!—EDITOR SINGLE TAX REVIEW.