

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SINGLE TAX.
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No. VI. TRADES UNIONISM AND SOCIALISM.

It is not probable that the protective delusion will so possess the people of New South Wales as to cause a change of policy in the direction of increased duties on imports. There is little doubt, even in the minds of many of those who champion trade restriction and try to appear confident of ultimate success, that the political power of their party reached high-water mark at the last general election. The depression that for a few years had sat so heavily upon New South Wales, as a result of former land booms, severe droughts, the cessation of heavy governmental expenditure on public works and other obvious causes, was an instrument upon which the protectionists played to some purpose and to eager audiences. A great mass of the people, conscious that things were not by any means satisfactory or prosperous, were discontented, and the disciples of restriction had the great advantage of proposing a change to those who were weary of existing conditions. But since then much has taken place to reconcile the electors of this colony with the difference between their tariff and that of most of the other colonies. The latest statistics from all quarters have shown substantial advance on our part and have rendered it necessary on the part of the press of some of these colonies to resort to misrepresentation so labored and palpable as to entirely defeat its own ends. The present feeling among the largest class of those who think about these things in our own colony is becoming more and more favorable to expansion rather than restriction of freedom of trade. In the United Kingdom the real vital organization of free trade — the Financial Reform Association — has given its full adhesion to the single-tax principle, and avowing that land value taxation and the total abolition of all other imposts is the end to which all that British free trade yet means is but part of the road, is working with a vigor and directness that cannot fail to have great and immediate effect. So far from any idea of protection, or fair trade as they call it there, getting a hold, the air is full of demand for the larger measure of free trade which shall give to labor its due reward. There is ample indication that such a wave of public feeling as that which once swept down the Corn Laws is now rising, and that before it land monopoly in Great Britain will go. The keener political intelligence which during the past few years has awakened among the masses will hardly much longer be hoodwinked by a scheme which helps one class at the expense of many others.

Trades unionism is another reed upon which labor is beginning to learn that it has leaned far too confidently. We have had proof of how little of such pressure it can bear in the defeat and practical decimation of the Knights of Labor in the United States. This was the most powerful and splendidly organized industrial army the world has any record of, and in the days of its growth much was confidently expected from it — too much. It was thought that this combination of workers, knit with oaths and passwords almost from sea to sea across the States and marching in its tens of thousands behind the banners of every branch of handicraft, could secure a much fairer division of the products of labor than had hitherto prevailed. It seemed a natural thing to

those who had not deeply considered all the aspects of the question that if a majority of the laborers of a country combined to make a demand not in itself very unreasonable their employers would have no choice left them but to concede what was asked. It only needed a sharp trial such as that of the Burlington strike and others which followed it to show how baseless were the hopes of the great brotherhood. Put to the test at the hour of their supreme strength the Knights of Labor failed utterly. It was practically demonstrated that organized labor was no match for the power of monopoly, which, secure in the possession of the avenues to production, could bid labor submit to its terms or stay idle and starve. Organized labor found that organized capital fended by a protective tariff from the competition of outside capitalists, but free to pick and choose from outside labor markets, was master of the situation and there was an end of the matter.

How could it be otherwise? Across the sea were millions of workers far too poor and miserable to refuse any offer of employment such as was made to them by the American hirers of labor, and behind these hirers was the protection of the law to uphold them in bringing these over if they chose to do so. In the year 1887 there were over one thousand strikes in the United States, more than 60 percent of which completely failed, from the reasons given above. And the competition of laborers for employment, which overthrew these strikes, did not in the majority of cases come from outside the States— it was on the ground already, and waiting for the chance to step into someone's shoes. The fact is that trades unionism has no power in itself to better the general condition of the whole field of labor, and therefore can only help some laborers to the loss of others. It has no alchemy in it to turn stones into bread or increase the small stock of wealth which an ever-increasing demand for rent leaves for division between labor and capital. Like protection by tariff, trades unionism is warfare, and not only warfare between labor and capital but between labor and labor. Thus if a certain department of industrial producers, such as ironworkers, band themselves together and insist that their wages shall be increased or their hours of work lessened it is probable that if they are strong enough in this particular instance what they ask will be granted to them. But it is certain that before such a request is made rent has so pressed upon the returns to the capital of their employers that a further reduction of such returns could not be submitted to. This being so, and rent being inexorable in its demands, it can only follow that any advantage secured by the ironworkers must be in some way made up to the employers or they cease from engaging in business. As a result of this union ironworkers might receive a better wage than before. On paper it would look like that, and nothing else would be shown. But permanent employment would not be given to so many ironworkers. The condition of those who worked might be bettered, but the number of those who could not get work to do would be increased. This process, working not in one trade or two but in nearly all, would gradually create an army of needy and desperate workmen without the pale of trades unionism, who would ultimately overthrow any organization. The law of supply and demand is mightier than any barrier that can be raised against it by society rules and decrees.

Trades unionism is hopeless of any large or enduring good to the world's workers. It is natural that they should have recourse to it as a measure that locally or for a time brings with it something at least of betterment for them. So wretched and so shameful is the lot of the working

classes in the old countries that they may well be pardoned for taking up nearly any weapon or trusting for help to almost any expedient. But let us look the thing squarely in the face. Let us take, for illustration's sake, the effort that is continually being made by many branches of trades unions to prevent the employment of female labor in competition with them. I, for one, hold that it is a disgrace to humanity, almost deeper than any other, that female labor should be even heard of in the world; that it should be necessary for women to engage in actual toil of any kind in order that they may live. But in the present condition of things they are compelled often enough not only to support themselves but others by work. Trades unionism, speaking on behalf, say, of male workers, bars the way, however, and says women shall not engage in certain occupations. But it does not say what the women thus debarred from earning a livelihood are to do. It is not concerned with them and has nothing to say on the subject at all. But something must become of them. By preventing women from entering into competition with them the condition of trades unionists and those dependent upon them is bettered, the condition of the women and those dependent upon them is made worse. Continue along this line far enough, let the operation of such a rule be applied not merely to women but to competing labor generally, and in time you will have a hungry and desperate force, outlawed by unionism and arrayed against it, which cannot be restrained. If trades unionism had anything to offer those whom it seeks to prevent from competing with it in the way of sustenance — if, as well as seeking to say what certain labor should not do it could satisfactorily say what it *should* do — it might claim having solved the labor problem. Until then it can only claim to engage in a warfare, necessarily selfish and ultimately futile against its own brethren, for the pitiful rewards which monopoly allows it.

Just as throughout the world trades unionism, being found insufficient, is going towards its decay, Socialism, broadly so called, is growing up. Everywhere and in considerable numbers are to be found those who, vaguely and without any particular plan, or definitely and according to some scheme, believe that individualism should cease and that all production should be undertaken by the State on behalf of its units. There are many sects of Socialists with very little difference between them but that of proposed method, so that I will merely deal with the general idea underlying them all, taking as its mouthpiece the Social Democratic Federation. "The means of production, distribution and exchange are to be declared and treated as collective or common property," according to their teaching, and administered for the general good. Their thought is to abolish individual profit-making, set the State in the place of general employer and distribute the product according to individual needs. The practicability of doing this seems to me open to very grave question, and I cannot find that Mr. H. M. Hyndman or Mr. Laurence Gronlund, the leading English and American exponents of the proposition, have shown that it is capable of accomplishment. To begin with, State production and distribution could certainly not be undertaken in the fullest sense, unless as the Socialists propose, the means of production, exchange and distribution were nationalized or made common property. The difficulties that stand in the way of doing this are such as might well appall the most sanguine. When we consider what that simple term "the means of production" includes, and reflect that it covers everything used in ministering to human needs from the mighty ocean steamer or the railroad to the thimble and scissors of the workman's wife, it begins to be obvious that the functions of the State under socialism would be many and cumbrous and their discharge difficult, and hardly in

consonance with the average idea of human liberty as far as we have gone. The administration of a system of compulsory co-operation which would involve the control by the State of all means of production is hardly to be conceived as a possibility. But larger questions than that of expediency or means of accomplishment are involved. It might be that what the Socialists aim at could be done — that everything could be produced under State management by State workers and divided among State recipients — that, in fact, any country might become a cooperative association. Insurmountable as the difficulties seem, that might be possible, and under such a system the people of that country might be and probably would be very much better off than at present. But between the proposals of Socialism and what the single tax seeks to effect there is a difference of principle absolute, and not to be compromised. To nationalize anything whatever, such as means of production or exchange, which may be the product of individual effort; to take away from the individual that, or a portion of that, which he has himself solely produced, and apportion it among himself and others, is simply the unjust and tyrannical principle of tariff protection masquerading in a new dress.

What the single tax would accomplish is to give to the community the value created by the community, not that arising from individual effort. To nationalize land by justly dividing its value among the creators of that value is a very different thing from nationalizing something which may be the direct result of the application of labor on the part of an individual. The difference ought to be apparent, because it is that between right and wrong. Indeed, it seems to me that socialism, based as it unquestionably is upon a total misapprehension of the true meaning and function of capital, and regarding it per se as an enemy instead of a helpmate of labor, has at the bottom of it another misconception. All the writings I have read upon the subject appear to assume that under any possible condition the accumulation or possession of large quantities of wealth by individuals must mean that such individuals have unduly drawn from the general store of wealth, to the deprivation of others. Under the present reign of monopoly it very often does mean that Gronlund very strikingly points out the impossibility of any man receiving only payment for services rendered to the community at the present rate of such payments amassing the enormous fortunes which some individuals possess. He sees clearly that such fortunes in all cases arise in a large measure from the monopolization by some of what is produced by others. But he does not see, strangely enough, and all other Socialists do not see, that if the storehouse of raw material were open to all upon equal terms, no one could amass wealth without having added to the general store at least an equal quantity. If raw material were nationalized the possession of 10 million pounds worth of wealth by any individual, if that were possible, could only mean that that individual had received value from the community to that amount for wealth bestowed upon the community by his own labor, or by the exercise of some special and beneficial power or faculty. In other words, if the power of monopoly were destroyed, as the single tax would undoubtedly destroy it, no one could possess any wealth other than wages. And wages being the reward of production, the more wealth a man possessed the greater would have been the service rendered by him, and the greater the wealth of others.

Socialism is the beginning of the end, and its growth is a happy augury for the future of labor. Whatever injustice or impracticability it involves, and whatever entanglements of ethics and

moral principle, will be shed as it goes along. The socialists are the first considerable body of reformers who have recognized that labor has rights; that what men want is not better payment and shorter hours in the way of concessions or favors, but that every human being has an indefeasible right to life and all that may be requisite to satisfy its needs. They are at least on the right scent in that respect and between them and the advocates of the single tax there is no quarrel. They agree with us that land must be nationalized, but feel that something further is necessary, namely, the nationalization of all means of production, exchange and distribution. We, on the other hand, believe firmly that with the nationalization of land everything they seek to accomplish will be done, and the highest possibilities of human happiness, well-being and moral and physical development reached. We are content to await the issue and join hands with the Socialists, or any other body whatever, in striving to secure equality of access to natural opportunities of production among men. It is certain that no step in the direction of nationalizing the means of production and distribution can be undertaken until land is first nationalized; and when this is done, we are confident that it will be found that the end has been reached, and that nothing more remains to be done.

Of the method by which we propose to reach this end, of the justice of that method towards landowners as well as the rest of the community, of its practicability and completeness, I shall speak in concluding papers, endeavoring to show how groundless are what seem the strongest objections raised against it; and to demonstrate that it will accomplish what every device yet tried for the substantial bettering of mankind has failed to do.