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SINGLE TAX VS SOCIALISM

A Brief Statement of Difference.

LETTER by Charles J. Finger

Sir:

Before touching upon my main theme, for the benefit of the writer, "Patriot," and his friends, and relying upon my readers not to rush into any hysterical conclusions as to my supposed tendency toward fire and blood, I will give a brief exposition of the main difference existing between the Single Tax Ideas and Socialism, as remedies for social inequalities and discontent.

One lays little stress upon a fair hearing, because "smart" editors too often willfully cause misrepresentation by such paragraphs as this, for instance:

"When Henry George and his communistic followers get their way, and divide up Pierpont Morgan's earth, what will the fellow do who gets his section up at the Norfth Pole?"

Or this specimen of poor wit from the San Angelo Standard:

"While a party of socialists were holding an open air meeting at San Antonio Sunday, a heavy shower of rain fell and dispersed the gathering. The strange part of the story is that only that immediate section of the city was visited by the shower."

This has not very much to do with the question, but I cannot avoid taking a fancy passing shot at the self appointed moulder of public opinion, the modern journalist, too often unfortunately, toward all reform movements a malignantly hostile critic, with very limited intellectual resources.

Patriot is a gentleman who has no very clear conception of the meaning of the terms he employs. The much lamented thinker, Mr. Henry George, was neither a socialist nor an anarchist, and could not, by any possibility, be both. An anarchist can no more be a socialist than black can be white, and a socialist can no more be an anarchist than four can be zero, and a single taxer can not be a socialist.

Anarchism proper is the apotheosis of destruction. Philosophical anarchism, as advocated by Count Tolstoy, Prince Nropokin, B. J. Tucker and the eminent geographer, Elisee Reclus, is an interesting and beautiful, but impossible ideal, and a

thing entirely apart from terrorism or assassination. It is a Utopian dream. Very well, let us in a moment, put the anarchism aside once and for all.

Socialism is a state of society wherein the state shall own all means of production, exchange and distribution. Anarchism and socialism are, as the poles, asunder. Socialism, according to Lord Lytton, is the art of diffusing throughout a community the tranquil happiness which belongs to a virtuous and well ordered household. Anarchism, is in the words of an exponent, more energetic than grammatical, “to down with everything what’s up.”

Now, with anarchism, we are finished. Socialism and the single tax idea can be compared and measured, having a common ground. Yet, between the single taxers and the socialists, in a great, gulf fixed. Would it were bridged. To Mr. Henry George (and his followers, headed by Mr. Tom L. Johnson, are not divided) the expropriation of the mass of people from the land is the great and universal cause of the splitting up of the people into rich and poor, according to Karl Marx, (and his followers are not divided on the main issue, albeit, woefully split as to methods), the cause of the present antagonism of the classes and of the social degradation of the workers, is their expropriation from all means of production, in which the land is, of course, included.

Mr. George, on the one hand, advocated, not an Patriot imagines, the immediate despoiling of the Haves for the Have-nots, but the leaving tenures and land titles of land, as they are now, without any change whatever, appropriating ground rent to uses, by the expedient of a single tax upon land values.

On the other hand, the Marxian socialists demand the resumption by society of the land, and not only of the land, but of all other means of production likewise. Plainly put and avoiding all side issues, these are the main differences between the followers of Henry George and Karl Marx. Both seek a peaceful solution of the dreadful problem; both recognize that violence brings reaction.

Now, for a little history. Mr. Henry George, in the course of his very active career, even when circumstances (or say an application of relative ethics) in a less upright man would have prompted a different course. Mr. George I say, never declared himself a socialist, although his lectures had the undoubted effect of stimulating socialists to activity. In 1886 the United Labor Party and Anti Poverty Society were formed to represent the political and religious sides of the move-ment. Mr. George was nominated for mayor of New York and polled 68,000 votes, the socialists supporting him. In 1887, being nominated for governor by the U. L. P., something happened to cause dissension (it is not necessary to rake up old bones here), and Mr. George declared against the socialists in

convention, and ever afterwards they bitterly denounced him. He worked with the Democratic party for free trade on the ground that protective duties must be repealed before taxation can be concentrated on land values, thereby showing, I believe, his sound, practical, common sense. Incidentally, it is as well to mention, for the benefit of the Cleveland Democrats that George's work, Protection and Free Trade, was published in the Congressional Globe Library as a supplement to the speeches of five congressmen who advocated the single tax (Tom I. Johnson, Jerry Simpson, John DeWitt, Warner, Jas. G. McGuire and Amos J. Cummings) and largely helped to elect Mr. Cleveland to his second term of office.

Now whilst, as I have said, single taxers are not socialists, on the ground of common interests, many independent socialists have decided to bridge the gulf and work for the single tax. Here, they see are men of all shades of opinions, banded together in a party with definite, clear principles, based on scientific political economy, so co-operation becomes, not only possible, but even absolutely necessary. The cause that led William Morris to put forward his famous policy of abstention, are now things of the past. Obfuscation is no part of the single tax policy.

Socialists may readily recognize that the adoption of the Single Tax would municipalize land values, that is to say, it would pour into the public purse all the wealth which has been created by the community, and hitherto absorbed by the land monopolists. It would mean the solution of the overmastering problem of the unemployed and the tramp, and the unskilled laborer driven by the force of competition and trust supremacy to seek a continually lower margin of subsistence. Generally, it aims at the poet's ideal of "Joy in widest commonalty spread"—and the re-distribution of the national leisure, pleasure and treasure, the hastening of the advent of that time when:

"Some day without a trumpet's call,
This news will o'er the earth be blown;
"The heritage comes back to all
The myriad monarchs take their own."

The single tax party is, in short, the real reorganized and re-vivified army of true democracy, not the miserable transparency of William Jennings Bryan, the incomprehensible mixture of that astute politician David B. Hill, the abortion of Henry Watterson, nor the emasculated creature of Grover Cleveland, (that serene duck hunter), and socialists will do well to co-operate with a party working along these lines. Nevertheless, it must be distinctly understood and I would insist upon the fact, that Mr. George was not a socialist, Mr. Tom Johnson is not a socialist, and the single taxers as a body, whilst not believing with the thoughtless that there is something

sinister in the name, are not likely to ever dub themselves socialists. Yet to socialists, I say it is wise to drop many points that are at issue and work for the common-weal. Let the motto be the shortest road to the goal.

Summing up, let it be granted for the sake of argument that the adoption of the single tax is an accomplished fact, that the progress of the human race would by no means cease, neither would the goal of our human aspirations and hopes be reached. With plentiful food and drink, sufficient clothing for the body and adequate housing within reach of everyone, the higher aspirations and faculties of man will have a new and wider horizon, and the higher life will be pursued with an energy rivaling that hitherto devoted to personal gain. With the sincere socialist however, land monopoly comes first in the list of evils to be eradicated.

I sincerely hope that Patriot and his friends will read aright and examining themselves, see whether after all they be not ready to accept the faith. Too many revile who do not understand, or cannot see solely because they are bandaged with the handkerchief of ignorance. According to the Buddhist mythology the blessed Nervana was shrouded from searching mortals by the Veil of Maya. We too have a Veil of Maya the woof whereof is our own selfishness, and therein also is intermingled threads of prejudice and thoughtlessness, hiding from our work-weary disappointed eyes the True Path, after all so very near. May the veil be torn asunder so that we may at last step upon the road. And though the road be narrow, steep and rocky, and we toil worn and tired, the Heaven-lit torch of progress is in our hand. Forward, brothers forward! Look upward and onward with hopeful eyes, for there is, seen in the distant mountain tops tipped with the rosy glow of the Coming Day, when the tired workers' groan, and the worn mothers' sigh, and the tender children's wail will be heard no more. There at least the pathway is strewn with the sweet scented roses of hopes. There, brothers dwell the Spirits of the Dawn.