

THE SINGLE TAX REVIEW

A Record of the Progress of Single Tax and Tax Reform
Throughout the World.

THE LINE OF LEAST RESISTANCE.

(For the Review)

By EX-GOVERNOR L. F. C. GARVIN.*

It is a common saying that "the people have as good government as they deserve." Although uttered by radical as well as conservative speakers, the statement has always impressed me as being untrue.

In fact, the people of this country have completely lost control of their own government. Every department of it, executive, judicial, and legislative; national, state, and municipal; is out of their hands, and beyond their reach.

In order to effect a radical reform of any kind, not merely a majority, but at least four-fifths, and probably nine-tenths of the voters, must be in its favor.

Not infrequently the people can choose a satisfactory executive, but his powers are so minimized by constitution and laws that he can accomplish but little in the way of popular reform. The judiciary, on the contrary, whose function it is to act as a brake upon the legislature, the executive, and upon the people themselves, is endowed with too great authority by the organic laws which create it.

As to the legislature, not one in the United States is at all representative of the will of its constituents. The most that can be expected of any of these bodies is that it will enact haltingly some particular measure which was made the leading issue in its election. The choice of legislators from single election districts must result, as a rule, in their representing money rather than a majority of their constituents.

Government in this country is in the control of an exceedingly small minority of the people, a class of men utterly opposed to radical reforms. Our rulers are:

- (1) Trust magnates and other beneficiaries of monopoly;
- (2) Nearly all of the very rich, who, quite naturally, are satisfied with the bridge that has carried them safely over;
- (3) The great body of the newspapers of the country, which, if not owned by, are affiliated with, the conservative rich;

*The writer of this article is the Ex-Governor of Rhode Island, a man who has done more than any one in that State to rescue the little commonwealth from the condition that suggests a likeness to the "rotten boroughs" of England previous to the extension of the franchise in the United Kingdom. Ex-Governor Garvin is a well known Single Taxer; a man of high courage and tenacity of purpose; one of the eminent names that will lend distinction to the beginning of our movement in the day when its final chapter shall become history.—Editor *Single Tax Review*.

(4) Most of the office-holders, whose positions have been won by the lavish use of money in their behalf.

These four classes are followed and supported by a great multitude who allow their employers, or the editors of the leading newspapers, to do their thinking for them, and are not opposed by another mass of voters who seem indifferent because they can perceive no chance or hope of successful resistance.

The problem before the American people is: How can the power of money and the indifference and subservience of the voters be overcome?

Theoretically, it would seem to be possible to arouse in the voters of a state sufficient interest in the Single Tax to cause the legislature to enact a local option law. The attempt was made in Delaware, a very unpromising field, it is true, and resulted in a complete failure. Nor in any other state does there at present seem to be any promise of success.

To this last generalization an exception must be made. There is one field in which the advocates of the Single Tax may work hopefully and, indeed, with an almost assured prospect of ultimate success.

I refer to the State of Oregon, where the initiative and referendum is established, not merely in the constitution, but in actual use. There is reason to expect that the Single Taxers of that far Western state will, at next year's election, bring the great social reform in some shape before the people of their commonwealth.

Oregon has indicated the line of least resistance, but, in my opinion, an attempt to secure the same amendment to the constitution in any state east of the Mississippi River would prove a failure. The essential part, and, as I believe, the only important part, of the Oregon amendment may be added to the constitution of an Eastern or Middle state, if only all shades of reformers will realize that it clears the way for every radical advance desired by a majority of the voters.

Here in Rhode Island, for the past six or seven years, a suitable amendment has been before the state legislature, but the dominant Boss, whose power is almost unlimited, has been able thus far to suppress it.

In substance, the pending amendment is as follows: "Legal voters, aggregating ten per centum of the number of those who voted for governor at the last preceding election, may propose specific and particular amendments to this constitution, by filing with the Secretary of State, not less than three months and not more than nine months prior to any general election, a petition that the electors may, at such general election, cast their ballots for or against such amendments. * * * Any proposition thus made shall be submitted to the electors by the Secretary of State at said general election, and, if then approved by a majority of the electors of the state present and voting thereon, shall ninety days thereafter become a part of the constitution of the state."

Against such an amendment no argument can be found. It is directly in line with the theory of our American government that the organic law emanates from the people.

No doubt to gain from a state legislature the submission to the people of an amendment conferring the popular initiative will prove a difficult matter, but if the Single Taxers of any state can secure the cooperation of most of the other reformatory organizations within its borders, their combined efforts will prove successful.

The usual course which has been tried in the past, namely, the taking up of each reform separately and seeking to bring about favorable legislation upon it, has proved anything but a success. It has resulted almost invariably in the enactment of an imperfect and mutilated measure, if any, and even then only after a long and exhausting expenditure of time and effort. As a net result

legislation is away behind the needs of the times and the wishes of the people. Nor is there any prospect of its overtaking their demands.

But with a reasonable minority of the voters given the power to propose constitutional amendments, a number of vital reforms, first among which from the social point of view being the Single Tax, would be given a trial within a very few years.

Lonsdale, R. I.

PROGRESS AND POLITICS.

An Outlook Upon Current Home and World Affairs.

(For the Review.)

By FRANK C. WELLS.

The Fifty-Ninth Congress came to an end in a blaze of flag-waving and appropriations. Its short session accomplished little save in the line of spending. Colonies, Dreadnoughts and semi-universal pensions come high, and since we must have them it is no wonder that the billion-dollar total that startled the country not so many years ago has been made to look almost like thirty cents.

In respect to constructive and reform legislation it was distinctly a "stand pat" session. In the House the rough-and-ready Speaker—more autocratic than Reed and vastly his inferior in depth and scope of mind—stood guard, assisted by the Dalzells, the Paynes and the Grosvenors—surely the most monumental pigmies that ever posed as statesmen. In the Senate, Aldrich and the other corporation watchdogs were in firm control. The disorganized Democrats under their Bourbon generalship made no headway. Representative Williams is an able and a likable man, but his limitations as a leader were as clearly defined as those of Bailey, Bacon and Blackburn in the Upper House. The pugnacious Tillman is oftener wrong than right, and there was no strong voice raised in behalf of real democracy as distinguished from party maneuvering. It is not to Yazoo, Miss., or Macon, Ga., that the Democratic party must look for inspiration. The Southern members are faithful to Jeffersonian principles as they interpret them, but in applying these principles they shut their eyes to the changes that a century has wrought. If to their opposition to federalism and paternalism and their free-trade devotion there could be added the sensitiveness to monopoly abuses shown by the progressive Westerner and the freedom from race prejudice possessed by the cultured New Englander, together with a real zeal for human progress, there would be united the ideal qualities for democratic leadership. It is unfortunate that Bryan, the leader most nearly uniting in himself these characteristics, should have no seat in either branch of the national legislature and should therefore be unable to exercise his influence at the center of party councils.

The few praiseworthy achievements of the short session are easily recounted. A law was passed reducing the hours of labor of railway employes, telegraphers and signal station men, thereby throwing additional safeguards about railway travel. The government obtained a limited right of appeal in criminal suits brought to enforce federal laws, thus doing away with the absurd practise of allowing technical appeals to the defendant and denying them to the prosecutor and permitting the opinion of a single federal district