

The Single Tax, July, 1897

Our American Letter.

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The Single Tax cause is moving forward with rapid strides in the United States; so rapidly, indeed, that veterans in the fight are not able to keep posted on the numerous and widespread evidences of progress. It is true we have had no victories like yours in Glasgow last November where the distinct issue of raising all revenue from ground rent won an election, but the political tendencies in many of our States are decidedly toward that end.

Washington State, the most north-westerly commonwealth in the Union and one of the richest in natural resources, is probably farther advanced toward the Single Tax than any other part of the country. At the last session of the Legislature two important laws were enacted, both of which warrant this assumption. One of these measures exempts 500 dollars in personal property and 500 dollars in improvements from State taxation, which of course adds that much more to land values. This law is now being enforced throughout the State, although the wealthy landowners are already fighting it in the courts and may yet succeed in having it declared unconstitutional. The other law passed by the Legislature was one to permit the people next year to vote, on an amendment to the State Constitution granting local option in taxation. When this has been passed upon favourably by the electorate, as it undoubtedly will, the constitutional barrier will be removed and any community will be free to establish the Single Tax and not be disturbed by the courts. Meanwhile the question of taxation is being well discussed in Washington, which, together with the enforcement of the new exemption law, is educating the people to the feasibility and justice of the Tax on Land Values.

Dr. B. F. Longstreet, one of the ablest orators in the movement, is now on his way to the State to devote his entire time to making speeches and distributing literature there. His expenses are nearly all borne by the local Single Taxers. There is a strong Single Tax contingent in the Washington State Legislature, and many of the State and county officers are avowed advocates of the reform.

A decisive victory in Washington would mean much for the cause, on account of the great natural wealth of the State, and which would at once be liberated from monopoly. Seattle, Tacoma, and Spokane are large and wealthy cities, and the effect of the Single Tax upon their business, as well as upon the farmers, would be magical, for it is speculation in natural resources, there as elsewhere, that has created millionaires within a decade and caused the commercial panic.

But Washington State is not the only one showing signs of progress toward the Single Tax. California, Colorado, and Massachusetts each gives unmistakable evidence of the same growth. In both California and Colorado Home Rule Bills, originating with and pushed by Single Taxers, passed the Lower House of the Legislature and were beaten in the Senate by only small majorities. In Minnesota a bill providing for the exemption of all improvements and increase of taxes on land values was supported by all the influential newspapers in the State of both political parties. Having been introduced late in the session it was not brought regularly before the House, but from published interviews had with the legislators it was shewn to have strong endorsement. Predictions are made by prominent public men that such a law will pass at the next session.

The Massachusetts Single Tax League last winter inaugurated a new plan of propaganda which has been very effective thus far. Banquets costing a dollar a plate were given monthly to a number of representative men in a particular calling at which a prominent speaker was invited to deliver an address on the Single Tax, he taking care to explain its application to the occupation of the guests of the evening. As is customary at all Single Tax gatherings, a season of questions and answers followed the speech to elaborate the points made by the speaker. Leading farmers of the State were invited to one dinner which was addressed by Thomas G. Shearman; he also spoke to one given for the benefit of assessors. Dr. McGlynn was the one chosen to make the appeal to trade unionists, and he did it eloquently and with great effect.

As a result of these banquets and diligent distribution of literature, many encouraging things have happened, among them being the friendly tone of the conservative dailies of the State. The *Boston Advertiser*, noted for its cautiousness, has recently commended the work of Single Taxers in several editorials. The labour unions of Boston last week passed resolutions endorsing the

principle of taxation which aims to levy on advantages conferred by the community instead of upon ability. It is clear that the Single Taxers of Massachusetts have captured not only the trade unions but the great mass of business men who have hitherto stood aloof from the movement. Massachusetts, it will be remembered, was the first State to adopt the Australian or secret ballot system in this country, and some predict that she will be the first to get the Single Tax.

Disappointing as were the election returns in Delaware last fall from our standpoint, it is certain that the hard fought campaign there has made a lasting impression, there is to be a Municipal Election in Wilmington, Del., this month, when Single Tax candidates will be voted for. The local men are making an earnest and systematic campaign, and whatever may be the result in votes it cannot fail to annoy pestiferous enemies and advance the cause of honesty in government.

In addition to these political tendencies in the various States there are other cheering signs of progress. Municipalities, in a number of instances, are making a partial application of the Single Tax. Quincy, Illinois, a city of perhaps 30,000, has just decided to construct a 17,000 dollar storm sewer, every cent of which amount will be raised from land values, the cost to be apportioned according to benefits conferred by the sewer.

Last week Judge William Gayanor, one of the members of the New York State Supreme Court, advocated the Single Tax in a speech before an audience of his own kind.

We are to have a higher tariff in this country under a law which will be passed during the summer. It is freely admitted, even by the friends of the bill, that the Protectionists will be swept from power at the next Congressional Elections, which will take place in the fall of 1898.

Single Taxers, however, are not taking as much interest in the tariff question as they did some years ago, on account of the inclination of the Democratic party to compromise and dillydally with the subject. At present we are trying to do more on the line of obtaining Home Rule in taxation and getting our reform started in States and municipalities. Just now this seems the line of least resistance.

The movement in Canada is in about the same stage of advancement as in the United States. British Columbia, where there appears to be a few Single Taxers in public offices, seems to be the most promising field.

American Single Taxers are watching the progress of events in Glasgow with increasing interest. Your experience with municipal ownership of street cars and other natural monopolies has been the subject of wide and favourable newspaper comment, and should you succeed in rooting out the greatest of all monopolies — landlordism—reformers all over the world will point to Glasgow as the model city, and as the beacon on the hill for municipal land reformers the world over.