

The Relation of the Single Tax to Other Reforms

CHESTER C. PLATT AT THE MEMPHIS CONFERENCE

(Condensed)

TO ask what is the relation of the Single Tax to other reforms, is to raise the question what should be our attitude toward other reforms. On the whole I mistrust that the attitude of some of us is not as friendly and helpful as it ought to be. Mr. Judson King, at the Baltimore Congress, presented what I thought was a most important and convincing paper on public ownership of public utilities, particularly dealing with the electric power monopoly.

Outside of Single Tax ranks, next perhaps to Senator Norris, I think Mr. King, and Dr. Carl D. Thompson of Chicago, are doing work of more importance and value to the people than any other persons in our country.

But Mr. King aroused some rather unfriendly criticism, mainly on the ground that (as one friend wrote to me) every improvement in the condition of the earth, under our present system of monopoly, must accrue eventually and mainly to the owners of the earth. He was treated by some of the critics as though he were making a plea in behalf of landlords.

Some time ago I wrote letters to various friends, sent them a report on the work of the Public Ownership League of America of which Dr. Thompson of Chicago is the Executive Secretary, and asked them to join the organization. Several wrote in reply that they could not join, because the final effect of public ownership would be to raise rent, and also to increase the amount of land held idle for speculative purposes, and *further* to shut out labor from those lands which it might use, and so it would increase unemployment.

ALL ABSORBED BY RENT

"Every improvement in the condition of the earth, under our present system of monopoly," it was said by one person, "must accrue mainly to the owners of the earth."

So they felt not at all attracted to the organization which I asked them to join.

All this is a more or less familiar philosophy to most of you, and some of you will remember the debate, which was just a little bit warm, over Mr. King's paper.

I asked a prominent Single Tax worker if he expected to attend the Memphis Congress and was a bit surprised and disappointed at his saying: "No, those fellows make me tired, with their acrimonious and tedious debates about interest, and about whether the Single Tax should come all at once, (as Mr. Peace of London advocates) or whether it should come bit by bit in a more evolutionary manner."

And I have attended some gatherings of Single Tax men when, in a manner shedding more heat than light, these subjects have been discussed, and also the question,

whether the views of Henry George were socialistic or not.

I have felt that I would like to ask some of the debaters if they had ever read the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, and what they thought of his views as to the *virtue of humility*. He says:

VIRTUE OF HUMILITY

"I cannot boast of much success in acquiring the *reality* of this virtue, but I had a good deal of success with regard to the *appearance* of it. I made it a rule to forbear all direct contradiction to the sentiments of others, and all positive assertion of my own. I even forbid myself the use of every word or expression in the language that imported a fixed opinion such as, "*certainly*," "*undoubtedly*," etc., and I adopted instead of them, "*I conceive*," "*I apprehend*," or "*I imagine the thing to be so and so*," or "*it appears to me at present*." When another asserted something that I thought an error, I denied myself the pleasure of contradicting him abruptly, and of showing immediately some absurdity in his proposition; and in answering I began by observing that in certain cases or circumstances his opinion would be right, but in the present case there appeared or seemed to be some differences, etc.

"I soon found the advantage of this change in my manner, the conversations I engaged in went on more pleasantly. The modest way in which I proposed my opinions procured for them a readier reception and less contradiction. I had less mortification when I was found to be in the wrong, and I more easily prevailed with others to give up their mistakes, and join with me, when I happened to be right."

In referring to the theory that improvements are absorbed by and added to ground rent, Mr. George said: "It requires reflection to see that manifold effects result from a *single cause* and the remedy for a multitude of evils may lie in *one simple reform*." And yet I must confess that I do not, and indeed I could not, always act *consistently* with this theory. That is to say if every improvement in the condition of society must simply make landlords more prosperous how can one help being rather indifferent to all reforms, save our own major one?

Why might not one be rather cold and indifferent, not only to the cause of public ownership, but to the cause of organized labor, and even to the cause of religion, if every improvement in the condition of the earth must accrue to the benefit of landlords.

REFORMS URGED BY GEORGE

I have quoted Mr. George as saying that the remedy for a multitude of evils may lie in *one simple reform*, and yet here is a queer paradox. Mr. George was a man who was most earnestly and actively and enthusiastically interested in many reforms. He was a pioneer in advocating the Australian ballot, and secrecy in voting. He denounced bureaucracy in government, he was a veritable crusader against corruption in municipal government, and his third

political campaign was one in which the paramount issue was the misgoverned and corruptedly governed city in which he lived.

He saw the evils of militarism and advocated the reduction of armaments. He said: "Standing navies and standing armies are inimical to the genius of democracy and we ought to show the world that a great Republic can dispense with them."

He said: "In legal administration there is a large field for radical reform. Here too, we have servilely copied English precedents, and have allowed lawyers to make law in the interest of their class, until justice is a costly gamble, for which a poor man cannot afford to sue."

He saw that with the growth of progress the *functions of government* must inevitably *increase*, as people found that government could do many things for them better and more cheaply than they could do these things for themselves. He said: "It is only in the infancy of society that the functions of government can be properly confined to providing for the common defense, and protecting the weak against the physical power of the strong."

WE MUST INCREASE GOVERNMENT'S FUNCTIONS

He said: "As civilization progresses the concentration which results from the utilization of larger powers and improved processes operates more and more to the restriction and exclusion of competition, and to the establishment of complete monopoly.

"The primary purpose and end of government being to secure the natural rights and equal liberty of each, all businesses that involve monopoly are within the necessary province of governmental *regulation*, and businesses that are in their nature *complete* monopoly become properly functions of the State."

He advocated a reform with regard to the issue of money, claiming that it should be the business of government to issue all money, rather than to guarantee the money issued by the banks, for profit.

He advocated the government ownership of railroads, and denounced the failure of attempted regulation.

He advocated the government ownership of electric power and he also advocated the government ownership of the telegraphs, the telephones, gas, water and electric power.

He even went so far as to advocate that the government itself should print all the books needed for the schools.

WHAT A PARADOX !

And all this, mind you, although he knew that every one of these multitudinous reforms would *improve* the world in which we live, make the locality which had the most of these reforms a more desirable place in which to live, and so redound to the benefit of landlords.

If we are loyal disciples of Henry George why can we not be as paradoxical as he, and follow him in being enthu-

siastic advocates and supporters of all the reforms which I have mentioned.

Some say that the reforms to which Mr. George was committed show that he was essentially himself a Socialist. Not at all. Mr. George recognized that those businesses which in their nature are *public* businesses, should be owned and operated by the *public*. But no other. All business of a *private* nature should be preserved for private initiative and conduct. And competition should be preserved in this field, because of its biological justification and because nothing but competition will arouse the powers of man to their best efforts.

How shall we determine what is private and what is public business? All those businesses which when turned over to private management require a *franchise*, should never have *been* turned over to private management. A franchise is a surrender on the part of the State or the city of natural and proper rights which belong to the State or the city, and they should never be turned over to private corporations, to exploit the people.

Young Men in Memphis Give Five Minute Addresses

FOLLOWING are five minute addresses on the Single Tax given in Memphis over the radio by two young men, both under twenty-five, on November 18, 1932. These addresses were given under the auspices of the American Institute of Banking, and the first is by Mr. Postell Hebert, of the Union Planters National Bank and Trust Company. Both these young men had never read any of the writings of Henry George before preparing for these speeches.

The Memphis Chapter of the American Institute of Banking has been giving much thought to the question of taxation, and they hold meetings among employes of banks, part of the proceedings being broadcast over the radio. They have aroused much interest among the people of Memphis.

The second address is by Mr. P. B. Trotter, of the Union Planters' National Bank.

BY MR. POSTELL HEBERT

In explaining the Single Tax theory it is first necessary to assert the primary principle, that all men are equally entitled to the use of the earth. It is important to note the distinction between the word *use* and *ownership*. Because for this use of land the Single Taxer holds that the community should be paid according to the value of the privilege.

From the funds so collected, all expenses of the government could be met and all other taxation could be abolished, and from this is derived its name—Single Tax.

To quote the Single Taxers themselves:—We propose to abolish all taxes save one Single Tax levied on the value of land irrespective of the value of improvements upon it. From the Single Tax we may expect these advantages:

(1) It would dispense with an entire army of tax gatherers and