

CHAPTER IV

What Has Halted Our Plan of Land Reform?

THE WORLD HAS witnessed the rise and fall of many religions and systems their supporters have believed of imperative progressive character. Often they remain but names or do not attain even to that dignity, leaving no impress on history. The last great effort we note is that of the Physiocrats of France. Attracting much attention a hundred and fifty years ago among people of thought, it gradually subsided and has long lost anything of an active character. What, we ask, is the condition of that reform to which we give the name of Henry George? Why has it lost the position it once held? Can it be revived and made a vital force in the future? This calls for impartial and objective study as far as humanly we are capable of making it.

Has the Plan Been Really Halted?

But first let us answer the question: Has the movement really halted? For thirty years no practical advance has been made in the United States, England, the British dominions and colonies. In other countries Georgeism has attracted little attention. More specifically, in this country for about the time mentioned no considerable city has

taken a step in our direction. The only large-scale campaign has been in California, and there the electoral contests of about twenty years ago, followed by that of 1938, have shown a constantly diminishing percentage of affirmative votes, despite an increase in the total vote cast. For a variety of reasons hereafter to be discussed, anything either good or bad which may be called "Single Tax" is treated with spreading hostility. No public man cares to come forward, unless already thoroughly tarred with the stick, to call himself one of the followers of Henry George.

I know that as against this it will be pointed out that Henry George schools have been established in many parts of the United States and that they have enrolled some thousands of students. Doubtless a number of the students will become earnest advocates, but this must be exceedingly small when contrasted with the millions of people in the United States. This does not minimize the exceedingly useful work the schools perform. They serve to keep alive a certain fire which in many quarters might have been but burnt ashes. Some able publications meet very acceptably the needs of the faith, but they make few proselytes. Few organizations exist as compared with the numbers of an earlier day. In England the conditions are today not materially different. Thirty years ago a very considerable victory seemed almost within grasp. Today this is not the case, although it is impossible to say what changes the present war may bring about. Yes, we must definitely admit that the direct movement has been halted.

Objections Offered to the Plan

We shall have now to consider, regarding them critically, some of the objections which have been made to positions taken by Henry George. The first matter to be taken up is inherent in *Progress and Poverty* itself. The brilliant

writer and speaker, who is at the same time the propagandist, may easily lend himself to overemphasis and overstatement. This the critics say is the case with Henry George.

It is an inference which antagonists draw from the pages of *Progress and Poverty* that the entire reason for poverty in the midst of unexampled progress is found to be in the land question, this although George recognizes the possibility of poverty among those all equally poor and in a manner commencing life together. Adversaries form their ideas upon this point by a consideration of the following extracts:

"The widespread social evils which everywhere oppress men amid an advancing civilization spring from a great primary wrong—the appropriation, as the exclusive property of some men, of the land on which and from which all must live. From this fundamental injustice flow all the injustices which distort and endanger modern development, which condemn the producer of wealth to poverty and pamper the non-producer in luxury, which rear the tenement houses with the palaces, plant the brothel behind the church, and compel us to build prisons as we open new schools."¹

Again *Progress and Poverty* says:

"Vice and misery, poverty and pauperism, are not the legitimate results of increase of population and industrial development; they only follow increase of population and industrial development because land is treated as private property—they are the direct and necessary results of the violation of the supreme law of justice, involved in giving to some men the exclusive possession of that which nature provides for all men."²

¹ Henry George, *Progress and Poverty* (Fiftieth Anniversary Ed.; New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1939), p. 340.

² *Ibid.*, p. 341.

Not alone antagonists but the average citizen refuses to believe that denial of equal rights of all men to the use of the earth is the source from which "flow all the injustices which distort and endanger modern development." He is tempted to regard such an expression as oratorical and rhetorical. Swinging against us, he attacks the whole structure which George has so well built up as showing the origin of the inequalities which have afflicted mankind. He insists that these expressions ignore the truth that many evils spring from the fact that men are free agents, exercising options which may lead them to invade the rights of their fellows even when not challenging rights to the use of the common earth. It is unreasonable that such a criticism should instinctively influence the judgment of men, but the fact can scarcely be doubted that the alleged overstatement has caused many thousands to ignore the soundness of George's main argument, and therefore prejudiced the end which the writer sought, and tended to delay the acceptance of his reform. This may well be one of the elements which has caused men to accept and afterward to neglect the arguments which he advanced.

After describing the conflict between the landowner on the one hand and the capitalist and the laborer on the other, George declares:

"Wages and interest tend constantly to fall, rent to rise, the rich to become very much richer, the poor to become more helpless and hopeless, and the middle class to be swept away."³

Here George enters upon ground modified by present circumstances. Today, at any rate, it must be recognized that the rate of interest has greatly fallen. This may well be because a greater accumulation of money has diminished its value. For a long period when the accumulation was

³ *Ibid.*, p. 528.

taking place the rich were growing richer. Now, particularly with increasing taxation affecting every one, so much is taken by the government that such a contention cannot be broadly made. It remains true that the very rich, despite a reduced interest rate, have still some surplus over living requirements, enabling their accumulations to grow, but the rate of growth has lessened. In England we may believe that the extremely rich can no longer heap up more and more property, and the same condition may soon exist in the United States.

Nor can it be urged, considering everything, that the poor in this country are growing poorer. For the moment the opposite is true. Today there are fewer of the desperately poor than ever before. It may be said that this condition is temporary, but even four years ago George's statement may, to many, have seemed extreme. Certainly then a very large percentage of the population was enjoying comforts and advantages never before experienced. While many of our people were insufficiently clothed and housed, we need not forget that a large proportion of them were the descendants, after seventy-five years, of those formerly slaves. These live to a considerable extent in states where landlordism flourishes as it has for over a hundred years. A notable difference is that while formerly these people were disregarded in our economy they are now taken into account and, in the North particularly, have often attained a higher standard of living. A large proportion of the workers are aided by the government's social security system.

Is it the fact that the middle class is "to be swept away"? Again the answer is not clear. There has been an increase of comfort. If this has any meaning, can it be other than that the middle class is growing at the expense of the very rich and, it may be, the very poor?

The fact that the positions which we speak of are the

subject of debate, may well have its share in the belief that, with all its merits, *Progress and Poverty* erred in overstatement and therefore that its essential truths might be disregarded. Critics even forget that George was speaking of another time and to a generation viewing the events of the day from a different standpoint. It is possible that, granting the continuance of all the factors prevalent when he spoke and wrote, the views he then expressed, and the probable consequences he prophesied, had the aspect of eternal truth, and that with a continuation of falling interest and rising rents and wages diminishing in purchasing power, the rich would have become richer and the poor poorer and the middle class gradually be swept away. Did George too hastily accept the then tendencies as permanent or as being certain to continue in like directions? We may fear that many men of today so view the matter and are thereby led to reject his doctrines.

We find that of late years land values have, as a whole (subject to temporary war conditions in some communities), been checked in their advance or indeed have diminished in many cases, while wages have positively and relatively advanced. This is in accordance with George's theory, or, rather, it is illustrated in reverse—wages advancing as land values are checked or falling. On the other hand, under these conditions the return to capital has fallen greatly. But the wage advance may have made up for this condition.

Let it not be thought that, everything considered, Henry George understated the sum of evils which private ownership of land has brought upon the earth. The real student of international affairs cannot ignore the circumstance that, more than any other element, this is responsible for the distress the present war has brought upon the world. We took occasion to point out this fundamental fact in *A Quest for International Order*. But the average citizen has a long way to go before he can grasp the situation.

He will do well to comprehend conditions within his own nation.

Henry George said:

"There is a vague but general feeling of disappointment; an increased bitterness among the working classes; a widespread feeling of unrest and brooding revolutions."⁴

Again he remarks:

"We cannot go on educating boys and girls in our public schools and then refusing them the right to earn an honest living. We cannot go on prating of the inalienable rights of man and then denying the inalienable right to the bounty of the Creator. Even now, in old bottles the new wine begins to ferment, and elemental forces gather for the strife."⁵

These are great words eloquently written. But regard for a moment the facts of today. Whether conditions are worse or better today than when George wrote, certain it is, due to his admonitions or otherwise, the general public and the politicians are more alive to the conditions of which George wrote and a disposition to meet them is more manifest. As might have been expected, this has first displayed itself in a grasping after means of correction which, on the face, would seem to offer the least possible attack upon things as they are with the least possible damage to present fortunes. Palliative if not curative legislation has been enacted and insurance furnished against the accidents or even inevitable events of life. Usually they have served needful purposes and have favorably affected the situation. Yet they do sidetrack vital reform and forestall, certainly for the time being, the ripening of the bitterness and the violence George anticipated. He was none the less the prophet because events have deflected

⁴ *Progress and Poverty*, p. 542.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 552.

the course he anticipated would be taken. But for the expedients spoken of, his judgments would have been vindicated ere now.

However, for the purpose of our present discussion, the fact remains that the average citizen sees only surface conditions, does not see the hidden dangers, and hence concludes that George was not a prophet. His prognostications are disregarded. And the beneficiaries of present conditions, although greatly grumbling, do not protest too much, for they continue to enjoy their holdings. Direct attack has been diverted. Cassandras are ignored and Jeremiahs unheeded.

George's Ideas as to Compensation

In *Progress and Poverty* Henry George was properly enough thoroughly frank and honest. He did not disguise his ideas and plans. For instance:

"We must make land common property. (Page 295)
 . . . As in the nature of things unequal ownership of land is inseparable from the recognition of individual property in land, it necessarily follows that the only remedy for the unjust distribution of wealth is in making land common property."⁶

More in detail he says:

"I do not propose either purchase or to confiscate private property in land; the first would be unjust; the second needless. Let the individuals who now hold it still retain, if they want to, possession of what they are now pleased to call *their* land. Let them continue to call it *their* land. Let them buy and sell, and bequeath and devise it. We may safely leave them the shell, if we take the kernel. *It is not necessary to confiscate land, it is only necessary to confiscate rent!* (Page 364) . . . What I,

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 328, 329.

therefore, propose as the simplest yet sovereign remedy, which will raise wages, increase the earnings of capital, extirpate pauperism, abolish poverty, give remunerative employment to whoever wishes it, afford free scope to human powers, lessen crime, elevate morals and taste, and intelligence, purify government, and carry civilization to yet nobler heights, is—to *appropriate rent by taxation.*" (*Italics George's.*)⁷

Honest and frank as these words were, any person who has had actual experience in striving to further measures to appropriate rent through taxation, if along the line he advocates, is met with shouts—"Oh, you are trying to rob us of our land. Under the guise of freeing us from the burden of taxation by exemptions you propose to destroy our homes by taking that for which we have paid and on which they rest. We will have none of your Single Tax." The farmer claims that he has spent his life paying for his land only to have it taken from him. The small home owner feels that after years of laborious saving to purchase a plot to build a home, it will be taken by the government, and that it is immaterial that he is permitted to retain a barren title. Neither will he stop to listen when told that in fact his taxes would be diminished, since in the large majority of cases his improvements are worth more than the value of his land, and that the yielding up of idle land, resulting from higher taxes upon it, would open opportunities for his children. He will not raise his eyes above the immediate fact that his ownership would be gone. Accordingly he arrays himself on the side of the land speculator and great site owners of the cities, and does this often with a fury that has boded little good for the would-be benefactor. He has been fed up by our antagonists on the words we have quoted and calls upon High Heaven and the votes

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 405.

of his children to protect him from the supposed communist Henry George. And this has been true from Delaware to California and Oregon. Taxation upon land values, the home-owner was persuaded, was to take his very lifeblood. This may not be disguised by saying that the thing taken is only a value which everybody created and not really taxation, but rent due the community.

The consideration, or perhaps rather the want of consideration, of which I have spoken has raised a solid, immovable block of opposition against anything which may be likened to the Single Tax, yet no one, except men like the Duke of Argyle, will deny in argument, in this country at least, that all men being created equal are entitled to an equal share in the value they have brought into being.

Those of us who have been on the firing line know the difficulty—the impossibility—of progressing toward the desired end under the heavy load of the phrase “confiscate” and “appropriate rent by taxation.” We have seen that in some instances communities have advanced with halting steps toward getting rid of taxation on other things than land values, and then has come a complete stop. We have experienced this in California. Here the owners of land in irrigation districts who have had for years their improvements exempt from local taxes have, equally with all other outside landowners, fought against the further freeing of improvements from taxation. True, they have had the benefit of such local exemption from taxation, but there they stop, trembling over any proposition to carry the reform further. They resist anything which avowedly means the attainment of common property by taxation, whatever the logical right may be.

Let us inquire further at this time why it is that after a measure of just taxation has been accepted there followed a cessation of its further progress. It matters not whether we look at the irrigation districts of California, of which

we have spoken, or to the provinces of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa—even Pittsburgh. In probably every case there has followed a period of real advance in prosperity. We are particularly assured that it has been thus in the City of Sydney, New South Wales. Nor do we forget benefits to the California irrigation districts. And yet, when in California in 1938, for instance, the opportunity was offered to move decidedly toward the taking for the public of a large share of rental value, the irrigation farmers voted as cheerfully against the proposition as did the farmers of any other section of the State. In truth, whenever the basis of ownership has broadened, the opposition to any further extension has seemed to increase.

Probably some of the reason for this situation has arisen from the carelessness, as we may believe, of a powerful section of humanity in its treatment of the less fortunate. But we must think that the opposition lies much deeper. As the subject is proposed to them, men think they see that the apparent end becomes more clearly the loss of what they have regarded as their homes, or so interpret the ideas of Henry George. How, differently presented, they might well regard these ideas as friendly, we shall hereafter discuss.

Parenthetically we may say that the statement that the end desired was to be gained by taxation, ignoring all other features of the problem, is too incomplete to be true. Important as is taxation, it is not the whole story. We shall have occasion to develop this thesis when we examine how the reform we seek may be given operation.

Is Refusal of All Compensation Just?

Let us consider now one of the greatest questions we have to face—that of the inherent justice of the proposition. Is it consonant with justice to take away from the present

landholder all the value in which he has placed his money and to do this without compensation? The importance of the question was fully appreciated by George. He said:

"When it is proposed to abolish private property in land the first question that will arise is that of justice. Though often warped by habit, superstition and selfishness into the most distorted forms, the sentiment of justice is yet fundamental to the human mind, and whatever dispute arouses the passions of men, the conflict is sure to rage, not so much as to the question 'Is it wise?' as to the question 'Is it right?'"⁸

His reply is to be found later, when he says:

"We have weighed every objection, and seen that neither on the ground of equity or expediency is there anything to deter us from making land common property by confiscating rents."⁹

If the wealth of land lies in the existence and efforts of the whole community, if equality in the right of all to live on the surface of the land forbids the purchase of such a right from a fellow being, then the common property of all in the earth forbids the payment to one for a right to use the property the value of which is created by all. From a severe legal point of view and ignoring factors hereafter discussed, the argument is not otherwise. If legally taken property comes by purchase into the hands of one not originally connected with the taking and innocent of any wrong, the true owner may have it again without any compensation to the innocent purchaser. Thus if the property of all be found in the possession of one he cannot when it is retaken be entitled to any return from all for his purchase from the original wrong taker. Herbert Spencer, in his early volume entitled *Social Statics*, recognized this. He remarked that

⁸ *Progress and Poverty*, p. 333.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

"The question of compensation to existing proprietors is a complicated one—one that perhaps cannot be settled in a strictly equitable manner,— . . . Men having gotten themselves into the dilemma by disobedience to the law must get out of it as well as they can; and with as little injury to the landed class as may be. Meanwhile, we shall do well to recollect that there are others besides the landed class to be considered. In our tender regard for the vested interests of the few, let us not forget that the rights of the many are in abeyance; and must remain so, as long as the earth is monopolized by individuals. Let us remember, too, that the injustice thus inflicted on the mass of mankind is an injustice of the gravest nature. The fact that it is not so regarded proves nothing." (Page 142)

What for the purposes of this discussion we are chiefly concerned in is not the abstract logic of the utterance of Henry George. We are considering the effect of his position upon the progress of the reform he was favoring. Tying this up absolutely with the matter of taxation, judging from campaign experience, we are forced to the conclusion that the position is by no means a persuasive or a tactful one. The average farmer, householder, or factory-owner, all of whose possessions rest upon land, jumps to the conclusion that any improvement in taxation through exemption of other matters and levying only on land values, is merely a scheme to rob him of his land and everything that lies upon the land. The wildest statements upon this point are made and believed. The Single Taxer may point out that the small landholder, being a houseowner, farmer or manufacturer, will be relieved of his most onerous tax burdens through exemption of his improvements, and this will avail little.

Something more must be offered if this reform for the general benefit is to be achieved by a successful appeal to the electorate. There must be a wide belief

that justice will be attained. If this is to be the end sought it is widely thought that a real and manifest compensation must be made. Until this point is reached no success is to be had. Now the general public will not accept our doctrines till the difficulty has been cleared away.

It is to be noted that, differing with Henry George, notable advocates of real land reform take the view that compensation must be made. This includes Alfred Russel Wallace, who, in his book *Land Nationalization*, says:

"In order that the state may become possessed of this portion of the value of all landed property in the Kingdom, it must compensate existing landholders and their expectant heirs. This may be done either by its purchase for a fixed sum or by securing them the full revenue they have hitherto derived from it. . . . The State merely resumes its own for the public good, but of course without diminishing the *income* which any living person does or may derive from it. The period for which such annuities are to last is a matter of detail, but it is clearly better that they should depend upon a certain number of lives than to be for a fixed term of years, because in the former case the recipient does not suffer the inconvenience and sense of loss caused by the cessation of an important part of his income during his lifetime." (Page 197)

On the following page Prof. Wallace more fully explains himself:

"Their (the landowners') accustomed enjoyments and reasonable expectations must not be interfered with. But no such rule applies to the unborn. They have neither expectations nor proprietary rights, and they may be justly disregarded when their supposed rights are opposed to the general well-being of the community. One may continue the annuity successively to any heir or heirs of the landowner who may be living at the passing of the act, or who may be born at any time before the decease of the said owner." (*Land Nationalization*, page 198)

WHAT HAS HALTED OUR PLAN OF LAND REFORM?

A German writer of distinction, Silvio Gesell, who expresses his high admiration for Henry George, says:

"The State buys up all property in land—agricultural lands, forests, building sites, mines, water-power, gravel pits. The State also pays for the things bought; it compensates the landowners.

"The purchase price is based on the rent which each piece of land hitherto yielded or would have yielded. The rent thus calculated is then capitalized at the rate of interest of the bonds, and this amount is paid to the landholders in interest-bearing State securities; not one penny more or less.

"But how can the State pay the interest on such tremendous sums? The answer is: with the rent of the land, which of course now flows into the public treasury. This revenue is equal to the amount of interest to be paid, not one penny more, nor one penny less, since the debt is simply the rent of the land capitalized." (*The Natural Economic Order, Land Part, page 56.*)

The two propositions resemble one another, the difference being that under Wallace the interest would be a general charge upon the community and under Gesell to be met by the rental accruing to the State.

Evidently the writers cited felt that the landholder was entitled to some consideration even though he was holding property the value of which the whole community had created, and that injustice would exist should such a procedure as taking without compensation be resorted to. Undoubtedly a large proportion of the community is influenced by such a feeling, considering that the landowner should not alone be the one to bear the entire burden of a condition for which all are responsible.

It is not my purpose to discuss at this time whether the writers named or George or the portion of the community to which I now allude are right. It is sufficient

to say that the majority of voters testing out the matter believe that they are confronted by an unjust proposition, and feel that in resisting its application they are fighting against unrighteousness. Unless this situation can be alleviated or greatly changed there is not likely to be large success before the general public for what we call the "Single Tax." How this condition may be met with justice will be a subject for later consideration.

Our Plan Involves More Than Single Taxation

Of course it is incorrect to think that the entire question can under any circumstances be met by the simple application of methods of taxation. There are water-powers, railroads, coal and other mines, forests, et cetera, calling for varied treatment. It is unfortunate that George never developed with careful attention, at least in *Progress and Poverty*, the application of his theories to these matters. Now, even more than in his day, they loom large in the public eye.

So far in this chapter we have discussed the proposals of *Progress and Poverty* which may have had a tendency to wear out the earlier enthusiasm of the Single Taxer and to retard the application of his theories. Let us now consider extraneous matters tending in the same direction.

Effect of Trade Unions

Viewing social conditions from another standpoint, delay has been occasioned by the growth of trade unions, which may be illustrated by the difference in the size of the International Typographical Union to which George belonged. In the 1870's there were between 12,000 and 15,000 members as against 75,000 today. At the same time its rules and price scales are now vastly more rigid. Whereas the total number of unionists of all trades were then counted among the hundred thousands, now they run

far into the millions. The workings of their organizations have greatly raised the wage level both in amount and in buying value. Their influence upon wages is by no means limited to their membership. Insensibly their wage-scales have in greater or less degree created a standard for non-members and followers of unorganized trades and occupations. Undoubtedly multitudes of idle men keep down wages, yet at the same time the wages of the employed serve to fix the demands of those seeking employment. All this, as George doubtless thought, finally serves to restrict the return to the landlord for the use of his land, and to this extent limits his charges.

Of course one cannot utterly ignore the argument that an undue rise in wages leads to a diminution in the amount of work of the character affected and hence unfavorably affects those who are the recipients of the apparent advance. Perhaps this may be the effect in particular instances. The argument attempts to prove too much to be generally correct. If it were a universal rule, then any advance in wages would return to plague the recipients, and this we know to be false. Alleviation of conditions through the operation of trade unions may well tend to prevent work in our direction.

Changes Affecting Land Speculation

The opponents of what we believe to be the true solution of the land question say in an exculpatory way that while it might have been well to have adopted George's theories sixty-odd years ago, conditions have so far changed as to render them obsolete or impossible today. They point out that, at least in many instances, profit from speculation has become unimportant or land values have decreased. Then of late years they say great fortunes have been built up having no relation to land values but presenting questions to be dealt with more adequately, according to a popular belief, through income taxes.

In the 1870's, when George wrote, land speculation was rampant in the United States. Everywhere people were buying land in the hope of soon receiving a large "unearned increment." Now conditions are greatly changed, due in no small measure to restricted immigration. We have reached a point where immigrants and emigrants almost balance each other. Many great cities have practically ceased to grow. In California and Florida special conditions will doubtless account for increasing land values and speculation in ground for some time to come. Elsewhere these conditions are about at an end, save for temporary increases where war manufacturing has brought together unusual crowds of people. The natural growth of population, limited as it is, will not more than serve to steady land values in some places. That is not to say that during and after the present war there may not be speculation in particular lands and locations.

Special conditions have arisen, notably within the past twenty to thirty years, modifying or extinguishing speculation in farm lands. Agricultural schools and colleges, as well as general increasing intelligence in proper management of farm lands, have resulted in magnifying production of foods supplied by the farm, in some important cases almost doubling the yield per acre.

The greater use of tractors has relieved the farmer from the necessity of employing a large proportion of his acreage to supply feed for his livestock and, despite increasing human population, these animals are diminishing in number, and thus more land can be used for man's food purposes.

At first blush the Single Taxer will be disposed to argue that these elements, resulting in larger possibilities of return per acre, would increase land values. But the fact is that increased productivity of land results in an ability to meet the demands for human sustenance from a lessened

number of acres. For we must remember that men can only consume a fairly fixed amount of food and thus the market is not capable of great expansion. To enable consumption to be met from a lesser number of acres is equivalent to the creation of new land and diminishes speculation, unless there is an immediate increase in the number of people to be supplied, and we have seen this is not the case. In only a partial degree can these acres be put to new uses. Farm land values are thus approaching a value-for-use basis.

The automobile has since the days of George affected farm values near cities in another way. Whereas up to a very recent date the market gardener adjacent to the city could feel that a secure market belonged to him, now the sort of produce he would sell can be brought from very great distances and marketed while yet fresh. The effect of this machine has therefore been, to extend land values and at the same time diminish their intensity. Again speculation disappears.

What is the effect of all this? Rapid growth in misery anticipated by George has been in a great measure checked. The acute attacks which we have experienced in the past may well cease, to be succeeded by a certain chronic condition, which will tend to continue a perpetual distress, such as existed before the war boom. The holder of idle land may not have the speedy sale he had sought for, but will slowly and unwillingly release his hand upon it so that men may be made more nearly free. We shall approximate the labor conditions which existed in Europe before the free lands of America were opened up. The various alleviating steps are certain to lose some of their effects. The evils of which we have spoken will reappear in their hideous aspects.

Other Deterrents

Those of us who have taken part in conflicts over taxation are familiar with other matters likely to stay the progress of land reform. The press is for all purposes practically in the hands of its enemies. Real estate agents have much to give in the way of advertising. We have nothing. Great owners of land, taking fright at the least step, spring forward to raise vast sums of money to control newspaper advertising and billboard and radio publicity. Every misrepresentation is indulged in. If incidentally we attack the sales tax, the agents of government interested in its collection are thrown against us, and can cajole or threaten merchants upon whose collections they report. The false statements all these agencies indulge in have more than temporary effect.

Another factor obstructing progress, although of lesser importance than those so far named, is psychological in nature—a certain mental rigidity on the part of those we call Single Taxers. The uncoguid among us want no association with politics, apparently forgetting that only through politics may any advance in government be made. Otherwise all good must be handed us from above, a method of progress we as Americans reject. An illustration of this opposition was shown when a large portion of our number criticized the Fels Commission because it favored as much as possible, keeping in sight its larger purposes, the Initiative and Referendum. It seemed to the members of the Commission that the Initiative and Referendum opened a door for the presentation to the public of measures looking toward genuine land reform, a door closed constitutionally against such reform in a majority of states. This door once opened could be availed of whenever a considerable number wished to put public opinion to the test. The Initiative as to taxation has been used several

times, but unsuccessfully. However, want of success on different occasions could be no objection to repeated appeals to public opinion, once an opportunity is opened for such appeal.

Again among the group just referred to there are many who feel that at all events the reform must be guarded against any possible contamination. For instance, when a proposition is made to tax large landholdings at a rate higher than the small, the idea is condemned as vicious. And yet the plan has been carried out to some extent in Australia with results beneficial to the public. Land cultivation has been furthered among those of lesser means. Again in California at the time that the Great Adventure contemplating the immediate taking for public use of all rental values was proposed, an examination was made by officials of the State of the large landholdings in Southern California. Although the report favored increased taxation upon such holdings, it was ignored by our stricter friends. Something of real value might then have been accomplished.

In other ways a like thing has occurred. Many forget that among the great elements of land value are the water-powers, and that these must be managed by the states or the Federal Government for the benefit of all, while taxation is not properly applicable to them. This latter assertion is sustained by the fact that as water-power is usually controlled by private ownership, any tax thereon is made a part of current expenses and paid by the public in the rate allowed and charged. Every complete monopoly collects from its customers the taxes it pays. But if a man advocates public ownership of such power he is apt to find himself in disfavor among the extreme. They fail to realize that such property is part of that which they desire held for the use of all.

Further, we are told that, granting public ownership of public utilities would be beneficial in itself, the net

result from it would be simply to raise land values, and therefore worsen existing conditions. Of course such an argument would apply equally to the preservation of public order or the advancement of education or a thousand other things dependent upon good government. It is not exactly true that only the landowner gains through the existence of these things. If true we might as well live among savages. Extension of civilization means longer and healthier life to the mass and not simply money to the landholder. The transfer from private to public ownership of a material portion of public resources must preferably be regarded as a considerable percentage step toward the ultimate for which we seek. It would leave us with one less opponent interested in fighting us. When we oppose such transfer we stumble over our own feet.

Again there are those who feel that any attempt toward the desired goal which aims at less than the total is to be resisted. Its advocates are denounced as "Step-by-steppers," the denouncers forgetting that since infancy the only method of progress has been step-by-step. Politically any other method means revolution, even if it could be made a bloodless one, and no one can be sure just what a revolution may mean or result in.

Those who have followed the history of the so-called Single Taxers must have noticed their decided differences of opinion and an apparent disposition to quarrel with others not of a precisely similar school. A broad line of cleavage formerly existed and indeed still continues to exist between those who regard themselves as the true blue Single Taxers and those who consider that the exemption of improvements and personal property is to be treated as a purely fiscal reform, of merit in itself, yet who refuse to accept the broad fundamental theories of Henry George. The Single Taxers "limited," as they are sometimes called, are perfectly willing to accept the steps proposed by the

more extreme men and to vote for any proposition looking to the freedom of production and trade, but reject our ultimate. Of this class were Thomas G. Shearman, who wrote a brilliant book entitled *Natural Taxation*, and John DeWitt Warner, for two terms a leading member of Congress from New York City. These men were looked upon askance by their more orthodox Single Tax friends.

Again the subject is discussed as "individualistic" rather than socialistic, and, accepting this terminology, the really orthodox consider that there is a perpetual conflict between themselves and all true followers of Henry George on the one hand and the Socialists on the other. Notwithstanding this, the Socialists seem at all times to be willing to accept the fundamental doctrine that all are equally entitled to share in the gifts of Nature, contending that such reform is only a part of the general change which should take place in society. The difference is much as if a traveler wishing to go from New York to Chicago refused to board the train because there would later be a change of engines at Pittsburgh, fellow companions leaving at that point. Thus the extremists refuse to travel on such a train because of the destination of some of their fellow travelers.

These people, following a narrow line, refuse association with the Single Taxers limited and the Socialists and deprive their movements of much potential strength. As to the "limited" people it was feared—though it could not be known with any degree of assurance—that they would leave before our goal was attained. With the Socialists it was thought one could have no part, because of fear that after our end had been reached they would seek to go further. The Socialists would not admit that all social good was contained within the scope of our ideas.

Meanwhile much energy is expended in inconclusive discussions as to whether rent enters into price, or whether or not the theory accepted by George as to the reason and

CONFRONTING THE LAND QUESTION

nature of interest is correct. These may have their place, but have little value as furthering the propaganda for a really great reform. Such disputes may not be of large importance, but they constitute at least brakes upon forward advancement and so are mentioned.