

## The Land Question in Politics

ADDRESS OF GEORGE L. RECORD AT HENRY GEORGE CONGRESS, SEPTEMBER 12, 1927.

THE ultimate triumph of the Single Tax must come about through a change in the law. A change in the law requires political action, and political action requires a certain measure of public education upon the merits of policies.

Propaganda on behalf of the principle, is therefore always in order, and in educating the public by the methods of propaganda it is wise to put forward the full Single Tax but when our cause reaches the political stage other methods must be adopted.

Political action in the beginning is always in the nature of a compromise. But a compromise measure is always worth supporting provided it arouses discussion, and embodies a partial application of the principle.

In the case of slavery the abolitionists were the pioneers in educating the public mind to the immorality of the institution. Their efforts finally brought the subject into the arena of politics. At this stage the pioneer agitators like Garrison and Phillips, whose labors had created the public opinion which forced the question into politics, were unable to afford the kind of leadership that is necessary when the cause passes from the propaganda to the political stage.

Lincoln and the early leaders of the Republican party made no attempt to commit the party to the immediate abolition of slavery, but contented themselves with a declaration that slavery should be confined to the states where it then existed, and should be prohibited from being extended into any other states, or into territories out of which the new states were to be carved.

This course utterly disgusted the anti-slavery leaders, who attributed the modified platform to political cowardice and indulged in some very violent vituperative language about Mr. Lincoln. Lincoln saw that the discussion of restricting slavery to the South must necessarily educate the public upon the immorality of slavery itself, and that in due time when the people were so educated conditions would be ripe for the next political step towards the ultimate abolition of slavery in the South. By this political strategy the Republican leaders attracted a very much larger following than they could have obtained if in the beginning they had stood for the immediate abolition of slavery in the South.

It is probable that we are on the eve of a breakup in the party politics of this country. There are no major issues on which the great parties are divided. The Republican party represents privilege, and the Democratic party would like to do so. The recent attempts to start a new party failed because no fundamental programme was offered.

We should strive to formulate a programme which has political possibilities, and at the same time will carry enough of our idea to insure its discussion.

Such a political programme should have for its central principle the abolition of special privilege, enjoyed by the so-called trusts, especially those enjoying access to raw materials denied to competitors. The Anthracite Coal Trust built up and maintains its control of that trade by two special privileges denied to competitors. It controls all the railroads leading into the coal fields, and discriminates in rates and service against its competitors.

It has also acquired practically all the land containing anthracite coal. The most of this land is not used, and will not be needed for at least a generation to come. It was acquired for the sole purpose of preventing its development by competitors of the trust.

This is the cleanest and most easily understood example of monopoly based in part upon ownership of land that we have in America. Nobody dares defend it. The Interstate Commerce Commission and the United States Supreme Court have denounced it as illegal and immoral.

The same condition exists in the case of the United States Steel Corporation, which maintains its control of the market in large part by the ownership or control of large quantities of the best coal and iron deposits suitable for steel making, which have been acquired for the sole purpose of preventing competition.

The Standard Oil Company controls the oil market, mainly by the ownership of the main oil pipe lines.

Regulation having failed for forty years to control or curb the trusts, it is probable that the next great political issue will turn upon some new method of solving this trust or monopoly problem. The obvious and only remedy apart from socialism is to restore competition in these markets. This requires that all competitors should be afforded equality of opportunity in access to raw materials and equality of service in transportation. This result can only be obtained in the field of transportation by the government ownership and operation of the railroads and oil pipe lines.

The Single Tax would secure equality of opportunity in access to raw materials. But the introduction of the Single Tax confuses the issue because it embraces more than the immediate trust question, and it is very difficult to get the public mind focused upon taxation.

A much simpler plan is an act of Congress providing for the condemnation by the government of a quantity of anthracite coal lands now held out of use, and leasing the same to competitors of the coal trust, upon moderate royalties conditioned upon forfeiture for non-users.

If it is advisable to include the trusts which are based upon patents, which I think ought not to be done from motives of expediency; the plain remedy is an act of Congress providing that all patents be open to public use upon



paying to the patentee a moderate royalty fixed by the government.

This makes a simple, feasible and easily understood plan of fighting those trusts, which is admirably adapted to political action.

Henry George compared the trust problem to a lot of little robbers, in a row, each taking his toll, with the land owner as the big robber at the end of the line, who took all that the little robbers left, and therefore recommended that we first attack the big robber, the private ownership of land. This is sound advice for propaganda, but it is unwise politically. Our politics are controlled by the trusts, the little robbers, who have perfected a powerful organization to that end. The land robbers have no organization, no lobbies, and no political power. But as long as the powerful organization of the little robbers control our politics we will be represented in Congress and state legislatures and in executive offices by men who will not allow the land question, or any other similar question, to be acted upon, or even discussed.

Our job then is to get into public life men who will be willing to at least consider and discuss the land question. The easiest way to do this is not to run a Single Tax party, or to try to publicly commit candidates to the Single Tax; but rather to induce an existing party, or a new party, and its candidates, to adopt the plan of attacking the principal trusts of the country by the measures to restore competition which I have suggested. Any candidate elected to office upon that platform would be entirely beyond the control of the trusts, and would at least be open minded, and probably sympathetic towards our ultimate remedy. In the meantime the proposition that a trust must not be allowed to own all the raw material necessary to supply a market, brings the whole land question into discussion, exactly as the political proposition to limit slavery to the slave states compelled the discussion of the question of the morality and expediency of slavery everywhere.

## In An Inspired Moment

THE burden of municipal taxation should be so shifted as to put the weight of land taxation upon the unearned rise in the value of land itself rather than upon the improvements.

—THEODORE ROOSEVELT in the *Century* for October, 1913.

ALL the country needs is a new and sincere thought in politics, coherently, distinctly, and boldly uttered by men who are sure of their ground. *The power of men like Henry George seems to me to mean that*; and why should not men who have sane purposes avail themselves of this thirst and enthusiasm for better, higher, more hopeful purposes in politics than either of the moribund parties can give."

—WOODROW WILSON.

## What Henry George Proposed

HAVING found the economic answer to the riddle of the Sphinx—"Why does poverty persist with progress?"—having found it rooted in land monopoly (whether feudalistic, or capitalistic in form would make no essential difference), Henry George's "Progress and Poverty" proposes the obvious remedy. It is to abolish land monopoly.

But as a practical proposal, abolition of land monopoly would have been altogether too vague. Few there are who would not assent cordially to it in the abstract, yet assail it uncompromisingly in almost any particular application. So "Progress and Poverty" stated the remedy in particular form. Whenever society has advanced very far beyond primitive conditions the institution of private ownership of land gives advantages to land-*owning* interests and imposes corresponding disadvantages upon land-*using* interests. Therefore whenever advanced social conditions exist, as in our civilization they do, private monopoly of land and private ownership of land are virtually the same. "Land monopoly" is the indefinite abstract term for what "land ownership" definitely expresses. Accordingly "Progress and Poverty" proposed to make land common property.

There was nothing novel in this proposal. From the day of Roman Cornelia's "jewels" down to Henry George's time, from the revolt of Moses in Egypt to the experiments of Owen in the United States, the doctrine of communism in land had been advocated in varied settings and practiced in numerous utopian ways. But this ancient remedy for involuntary poverty, this fundamental suggestion for an orderly social state, is discussed and defended in "Progress and Poverty" with unexampled thoroughness. Its expediency, its efficacy, its conformity to the natural laws of social life, its harmony with the moral law of justice, are there disclosed with a brilliancy of rhetoric, a richness of diction, a novelty and charm of style, a power of popular appeal, a cogency of argument, an abundance of apt illustration, and a resistless marshalling of the facts that count, which surpass every effort ever before brought to the service of the old doctrine that society must in some way make land common property.

But the way? Secondary though this problem is, the long history of disappointing colony experiments in land communism prove it to be vital. So the secondary problem too is discussed in "Progress and Poverty," and its solution demonstrated.

The result is a practical method for making land common property in effect, without assumption of titles, or revolutionary disturbance, or a risk of reaction, or any extension of the functions of government, or any dubious and dangerous experimentation. To quote from the volume itself,\*

\*"Progress and Poverty," book viii, chapter ii.