

It will scarcely be argued, in extenuation of our statesmen and legislators that, in the strenuous fine-combing of visible wealth of the country for revenue to meet the mounting demands of public obligations, land values slipped through unobserved, a negligible item. Land is not so hidden, elusive. It is conspicuously the source of all wealth and the material basis of our existence. Its distribution and use are fundamental to efficient production. Land is the one obtrusive material and moral issue that cannot be evaded—honestly—by intelligent men.

Nor can it be claimed that no federal nation has sought revenue from a land tax. The example of the Australian Federation is too well known.

We have, unfortunately, had no statesman to voice for us the real explanation with the frankness of Lloyd George. In the great constitutional crisis of 1909, and at a moment when Britain was called upon to face a vast programme of naval construction, he had the courage to speak plainly to the landed aristocracy about their evasion of national obligations.

He said: "We started our four Dreadnoughts. They cost eight millions of money. We promised them four more; they cost another eight millions. Somebody has got to pay, and then these gentlemen say: 'Perfectly true, somebody has got to pay, but we would rather that somebody were someone else.' We started building; we wanted money to pay for the building; so we sent the hat round. We sent it round amongst workmen; and the miners of Derbyshire and Yorkshire, the weavers of High Peak, and the Scotchmen of Dumfries, who, like all their countrymen, know the value of money—they all dropped in their coppers. We sent round Belgravia, and there has been such a howl ever since that it has deafened us."

It is scarcely possible to believe that our statesmen have been blind to the fiscal immunities of American landed interests. They may have lacked the courage to speak; but we should be sorry to think they, deliberately and of their own volition, connived.

Does any thinking man imagine that such immunities can continue much longer? Has the economic debacle and social upheaval in Europe taught our public men no lesson?

The issue is inevitably coming up for settlement. Militant democracy is not to be defrauded of its elemental rights. The return of the soldier citizen to the country he has fought for will definitely stage the conflict. Fiscal and economic reaction, like autocracy and political privilege, have had their day. The only alternative now to the reign of justice is the rule of anarchy and brute force, of which Europe has already shown us a sample. Is the choice of our statesmen to be for our up-building or for our undoing? Their lack of foresight in the prelude to the present political catastrophe does not lighten the burden of foreboding before the tremendous economic issues now finally demanding settlement.

"A FULLY equipped duke costs as much to keep up as two Dreadnoughts; he is just as great a terror, but he lasts longer."
LLOYD GEORGE.

Later News From California

AT this writing, twenty days after the election, the complete vote on the proposed Single Tax amendment has not been given out. The total vote cast for and against the measure will be about one-half the vote of two years ago. The percentage then was about 31%. This year it may fall to about 25%. Interest in the war and apathy as to everything else help to account for the small vote. The failure of the democratic party to get a man on the ticket for governor accounts for some of the indifference. Governor Stephens is a poor specimen of a progressive and liberals of all shades failed to go to the polls—democratic liberals because the Supreme Court so construed the primary election law that they failed to get their man Francis J. Heney on the ballot, and republican liberals, sometimes called progressives in California, had no candidate in the present governor who got the republican nomination and has become an extreme reactionary since he has been governor, as the successor of Senator Johnson.

The bulk of the Single Tax vote comes from the liberals in the old parties. The antis spent a barrel of money to beat the measure. All the papers, city and county, were heavily subsidized by advertising contracts. The Scripps papers months ago made a profuse pretense of support, but as the campaign advanced, big display advertisements against Single Tax began to appear in the papers, then reading notices, then editorial opposition. The labor papers, too, began to run advertisements against Single Tax and then began to shy away from it, and just before election withheld endorsement or openly opposed it. This was due to the action at the annual meeting of the State Federation of labor at San Diego, which adopted a land policy of its own to the effect that a heavy supertax should be imposed upon all idle land and all land held for speculation.

Organized labor in this State under the control of Paul Scharrenberg is now committed to this plan of reaching the idle land and throwing it open to use, and at the next election will doubtless be in the field with such a measure.

The large vote on the social insurance measure and the heavy majority against it would indicate that thousands of trade unionists did not vote on the Single Tax measure at all, and the action at San Diego on land reform would seem to be the reason.

No. 19 if adopted would doubtless have doubled the tax on every foot of land in California. One potent argument used against the measure was that in large areas of California under costly schemes of irrigation it would be next to impossible to segregate the value of the improvements upon the land from the land itself, and it was argued that as to such lands this question would be thrown into the courts and endless litigation would ensue. As to urban and suburban unimproved land held for speculation, No. 19 would have fallen heavily. As to such lands, the tax now imposed would have been more than doubled, probably quadrupled, and the selling values would have been enormously diminished. This made the land speculators very active indeed in their propaganda against it.

Paul Scharrenberg, as Secretary of the State Federation of Labor, is the most powerful individual in the State among the trade unionists, and a plan is now on foot to coordinate the forces of organized labor with the forces of the farmers to bring about land reform and other reforms, somewhat after the programme of the Non-Partisan League of North Dakota, and I have no doubt that before the next election this organization will be highly developed and will cut a big figure at the next election with its programme, including the proposed supertax upon idle land. If so, a sudden and drastic measure like No. 19 will encounter difficulties quite as great as those encountered at the last election, and at the election in 1916, and Single Taxers throughout the State are taking note of the situation when it comes to the formulation of another Single Tax measure to go upon the ballot in 1920.

State officials and bankers and land monopolists came out a few days before election in a most frantic appeal to the people to save our beloved State from the threatened calamity of Single Tax, denouncing it as pro-German, Bolshevik and anarchistic, and declaring it would produce here the chaos they declare prevalent in Russia. These printed appeals reached every tax-payer in the State. The result in war time was to be expected. Only the Socialist papers remained true. There is to be no let-up however. The campaign for the election two years hence has already begun. Just the form of the measure perhaps has not yet been agreed upon, but no step backwards will be taken, it may be safely predicted.

Luke North has had drawn and submitted to Judge Maguire a measure somewhat in the following form: "For the fiscal year beginning July 1st, 1921, and thereafter, all public revenues, state, county, municipal and district, shall be raised by a tax on the value of land irrespective of improvements thereon, provided that war veteran, college and church exemptions under Sections 1¼, 1½ and 1A of Article 13 of the present constitution shall not be affected thereby. Revenues derived from public utilities by the State or any political or subdivision thereof, or in the administration of justice, or in the exercise of police power are not within the purview of this amendment and are not affected thereby. The intent of this amendment is to prevent the holding of land out of use for speculation and to apply land values which the community creates to community purposes. All laws in conflict herewith are hereby repealed."

The foregoing is substantially No. 19 just voted on, with the exception that it elucidates a few obscure points and makes clear the time when it should become operative, and that revenues derived from public utilities are not to be affected, or court fees, or the right of the courts to impose fines.

Other Single Taxers favor an amendment more in accord with the Single Tax platform written by Henry George and adopted at New York in 1890, endorsed by the Single Tax convention at Chicago in 1893 and again promulgated by the National Single Tax League in 1912. This is what is called "the exemption approach," and would exempt after

January 1st, 1921, all improvements on land, and on and after January 1st, 1922, all personal property should be exempt from taxation.

So it will be observed that Single Tax and Land Reform are very much to the fore in California, and the next two years will see a tremendous amount of agitation aimed at the same objective, to-wit, to bring into use the millions of acres of fertile, idle land now held out of use by land monopolists in California. How this problem will ultimately be solved no man can predict, but that its solution will be earnestly sought in the near future no one doubts.

J. H. RYCKMAN

A Noble Lord's Belated Discovery

DOES anyone suppose that the agricultural laborer will return from the trenches to the old miserable conditions under which in most parts of the country he was underpaid, wretchedly housed, and denied almost any pleasure in life except such as the public-houses could afford him?" —LORD LEIGH, the Director of the Food Production Department of Great Britain.

Has the noble lord any idea as to how the laborer is denied the above comforts and necessities of life? Has he only now come face to face with the age-long economic problem? Has it ever occurred to him that the denial of the laborer's just comforts may in some way be associated as effect and cause with the granting of unjust privileges to others? Would Lord Leigh take kindly to the denial of such unjust privileges as he himself enjoys? Would he be willing to stand on a footing of equality with the laborer before the natural opportunities of labor from which all material comforts must come? Lord and laborer then would have the full product of their own labor, which is of course their only just due.

Economic justice makes no such demand as: "Sell all thou hast and give unto the poor." With justice done, there would be no poor. Is Lord Leigh ready to stand aside and let simple justice be done? Will he get from off the back of labor? Will he help in making the fiscal laws of Britain such that the price of access to natural opportunities shall no longer be paid by labor as economic blackmail to private owners, but as just tribute to the nation as treasurer in common for all?

What was the agricultural laborer, defending when he went into the trenches? What has he learned in the trenches that has changed his standards of living in the old land? Has Lord Leigh had to wait till the school of the trenches taught the laborer his rights, before he and his privileged class became aware of the wrong done? If leisure and education failed to teach the noble lord, what was it brought him to knowledge? Is the confession of injustice wrung from him by fear? Are the laborers to infer by the conversion of such as Lord Leigh that the only convincing argument is force or the menace of force?