

THE FRENCH AND RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONS—A PARALLEL

From a letter by MERVYN J. STEWART, appearing in the "Cornish Echo," 18th February.

From 1750 a group of great French thinkers worked out a land and taxation policy which they called the single tax "l'impôt unique." Claiming that the land in its broadest sense was the only source of wealth and that taxation levied upon exchange, accumulation, or development would cost the country more than it returned to the Treasury, they claimed the whole site value of the land for the Crown, as chief of the State, in lieu of all other public and private taxes; and as reversion to the principles of the feudal tenures under which all land was held of the King, the owner. This principle was assailed by Voltaire, but said by the great Mirabeau to be only comparable in its importance to the invention of writing, or the substitution of money for barter. Adam Smith was well aware of this teaching of the "Physiocrats," but as the house-servant ("tutor") of a Duke, he glided carefully over thin ice in his pretentious text books; but the same great truths had been taught in England by Latimer the Reformer; Winstanley, the founder of the Society of Friends; and Locke, the first English philosopher, to whose efforts we have a mutilated and corrupted memorial in our "land tax" assessment notices, dating from the reign of William III.

The Physiocrats did not discuss urban land values with the same acuteness as rural (Moses had the same fault), and never were able to rouse the urban workers as they did the intellectual classes. The privileged nobility kept the King from accepting the new teaching as long as possible, and when at last he called in the Physiocrat leader, Turgot, it was too late except for the landlords to turn against the King himself with a seductive programme of a peasant proprietary, to which illusion France is still a victim.

So it was in Russia. The Russian reformers of the last fifty years have stood to their watchword "Zemla u volya," "Land and Liberty," as we say. Tolstoy, their great and noble leader, never failed to acknowledge his debt to Henry George, the American economist, whose philosophy, as he

said, was the only known means to put the teachings of Jesus Christ into effect. Tolstoy also, in his matchless "Address to the workers in all countries," used illustrations from the Englishmen Thomas Spence and Morrison Davidson while waving aside Marxism (Bolshevism) with scorn. And so, in "A Great Iniquity"—Private Land Monopoly—which the TIMES was proud to introduce to English readers, he kept closest touch with Anglo-Saxon sane reformers.

It was the millions of his leaflets that destroyed Tsarism, because the Tsar was so foolish as to identify his cause with that of the great landlords of his entourage, his deadliest dangers. When the august Parliament of the Russian Republic was duly and freely chosen nearly seven-tenths (chosen in Proportional Representation by adults of both sexes) were Tolstoyan Single Tax supporters. The Minister for Agriculture, Mr. Tchernoff, brought in the first policy resolution of the Cabinet, which was passed into law almost without dissent. "Private property in land is hereby abolished without compensation." The Bolsheviks included about one-tenth of the Parliament, but at this stage they (by agents) induced the troops "guarding" Parliament to disperse the legislature, which has never since reassembled. . . . The purely beneficial work of the Tolstoyans will assuredly permeate and destroy by the whole force of a manly and simple peasantry the handful of "nationalizing" bureaucrats now ruling in Moscow.