

in Chicago and Tom L. Johnson's in Cleveland. The facts are, as they come to us from other than Socialist sources, that Mayor Seidel and his associates in the Socialist management of Milwaukee, are giving the city an extraordinarily efficient and honest administration; and that the effect of this upon local public opinion is such that, although their party vote is less than a third of the total vote of the city, they would be almost certain of election three years hence, even if they fail of reelection next spring. The opposition they encounter and the misrepresentations they endure, have a political, an ecclesiastical and a journalistic, rather than a capitalistic fragrance—except as “capitalistic” is made to include all phases of opposition to socialist parties. The characteristic odor of Big Business hostility seems to be missing in Milwaukee.

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THE DEAD HAND.

The common people of English traditions have been in revolt against the power of the Dead Hand for seven hundred years or more. But the Dead Hand still holds sway. And a deadly sway it is, for the common people.

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In its technical legal sense, the Dead Hand—“mortmain,” in the law-latin of the period when opposition to it took root in English thought—alludes to ownership of land without power of alienation. This tying up of titles in perpetuity, so that folk of special birth should own all the land forever, came to be felt as a grievous wrong by the thrifty business classes. As these grew in wealth they reached out for the broad acres of thriftless feudal lords, and encountering this Dead Hand of non-alienation they argued that everybody has a right to land if he can pay for it. They were willing to pay; so they cried, “Mortmain! mortmain!”

Echoing down the centuries, that cry has fairly well disposed of the Dead Hand, in so far as it has any influence over powers of land alienation. In the United States, for instance, restraints upon alienation, except in a very limited way, are strictly forbidden, and the law in this respect is firmly supported by public opinion. Only as corporations become land owners, and are laxly allowed to fix their corporate life at long terms, or to extend short terms at will as they expire, or to turn over their land to new corporations as their own corporate life approaches its end—can the Dead Hand be effective in this country in so far as restraints upon the alienation of land are concerned. Even

with corporations, soulless but immortal, non-alienation would probably be impractical; for titles to land could hardly be so tied up as absolutely to bar purchasers possessed of the price.

This is not enough, however, to prevent land monopoly. It is not enough to bury the Dead Hand completely. So long as any one inherits land—city or town land, mineral deposits or water power, highway rights, or forest or farming land—while any one else is denied a like inheritance, so long will the Dead Hand rule and with reviving and cumulative power.

We speak of land and not of houses nor implements nor other ephemeral products of human labor. To inherit these, is to inherit what living and working hands have brought into the world. If the inheritance is from dead earners, it is just; if not, the injustice can last but a little while, for the object perishes. But to inherit land, simply land, not surviving products of labor but the natural sources of future products and the sites for using products—this is to inherit that which no man has made, and which can be inherited by some to the exclusion of others only under the Dead Hand's sway. Shall generations buried and turned to dust determine for living generations how they shall apportion the earth?

Were the apportionment just, it would nevertheless be that of the Dead Hand, and therefore open to question by a people who believe that the earth belongs in usufruct to the living. But it is unjust. Every thoughtful person knows it is unjust. Who is there that can rise up and in the name of Justice argue that babies in the Astor line shall own the backbone of Manhattan Island, while the children of men whose work keeps Manhattan covered with buildings have no right to live there except upon terms imposed by owners of Dead Hand titles?

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Against this sway of the Dead Hand, so common throughout our Republic that men have come to be as indifferent to it as a butcher is to blood, much more can be urged than its injustice. Its influence directly and indirectly in fostering a class of impoverished workers and a corresponding class of rich idlers, with the social maladjustments and misery this causes and implies, can be maintained against all comers—all but such as like to profit by it, or hope to profit by it, or are prejudiced in favor of the Dead Hand. But it is enough, primarily, that the thing is grossly unjust. He who will not give this moral thought lodgment in his brain may be passed by for the present. But what of those who do recognize the

rank injustice of this institution of the Dead Hand? Do they wish to end it?

There is one rich man who does, who wishes it mightily, who wishes it to the extent of his income, which happens to be large, an income from the very source, too, that he is trying to dry up in the spending of it. Joseph Fels, who makes most of his money from land monopoly, is spending most of it to destroy land monopoly.

To end that institutional injustice in the United States, Mr. Fels is doubling every dollar that others give for the purpose. He has named five men as trustees, every one of whom is in earnest, every one of whom knows this country and its people from ocean to ocean and from north to south, every one of whom has won a responsible and recognized place in his own calling. The chairman of those trustees is Daniel Kiefer, from whom detailed information may be got.* He gives to the work half his time, nominally, and more actually, and he refuses pay. His work is his contribution, in addition to the money he contributes. The other trustees are Lincoln Steffens, Frederic C. Howe, Jackson H. Ralston and George A. Briggs. To magazine readers, the names of Steffens and Howe are familiar and justly respected; wherever the personnel of independent telephone manufacturers is known, Mr. Briggs can be vouched for; and Jackson H. Ralston, at the forefront of the Washington bar, is also among the leaders, professionally and sympathetically, in international arbitration. To those trustees Mr. Fels has not only pledged to double every dollar that others give, but has in fact already contributed to the work thousands of dollars more than has yet come from other sources.

The trustees are doing work for the object Mr. Fels has in view—the abolition of land monopoly in the United States. Good work, as we believe; effective work; in its main features, the best possible work. He who reads this, may doubt if their work is the best, and the doubter may be right. But let him find out about it first, and then think twice, for it is he that may be wrong. At any rate, if work is to be done at all, somebody must decide what it shall be and how it shall be done; and we question if there are five other men in the United States as well qualified in all respects for such a work as those five.

Not only have they the qualities of personal probity and thorough sympathy with their object, which could doubtless be duplicated again and again, but they also have the scarcer qualities of acquaintance with the whole country and its peo-

*Daniel Kiefer, Chairman Fels Fund Commission, 530 Walnut St., Cincinnati, Ohio.

ple in the respects which are most important for passing judgment upon the merits of methods and plans. Large amounts of money are not especially solicited by the trustees, although no large sums would be rejected we suppose; but every dollar counts, not only in the doubling but also in the uses of the fund.

We commend those trustees and their work to the confidence of all persons who, being desirous of abolishing land monopoly, not by merely wishing it away but by practical and progressive methods, are willing to assist financially in proportion to the extent of their means and the intensity of their desire for the result aimed at.

There will be no lack of financial support for the opposition work of maintaining land monopoly. There should be no lack of support for this the most hopeful attack upon land monopoly in the United States since Henry George pointed the way. What Henry George advised as the first practical step for the abolition of land monopoly, the Fels Fund Commission is trying to do.

EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE

TAXATION OF THE UNEARNED INCREMENT OF LAND IN GERMANY.*

Berlin.

The increment taxation bill, which passed the Reichstag and the Federal Council, after protracted debate, was carried by the votes of the Conservatives, the Centre, National Liberals, and Radicals, against the votes of the Socialists and some Radicals. Hardly anyone is satisfied with it. It represents a compromise in the worst sense of the word. Very little of the bill as originally submitted remains, and it must have required great faith on the part of the Secretary of the Treasury not to have thrown it over at its final reading. The land reformers also are sadly disappointed.

Hot discussions on principles were caused by section 1, which originally provided for the taxation of the unearned increment in general, but was ultimately confined in terms to such as is not caused by the property owner; and by alterations of section 16, owners of agricultural lands are practically exempt.

Passing over the details, which cannot be stated briefly and might not be understood very readily in another country, let me try to generalize. In order to find the taxable increment, the cost price (modified in an intricate manner) is deducted from the selling price after deduction of expenses of sale and other allowances. In cases where the purchaser undertakes to pay the increment tax, its amount is added to the selling price. If the taxable increment so ascertained amounts to 10 per cent of the modi-

*See current volume, page 132.