

# The Public

A National Journal of Fundamental Democracy &  
A Weekly Narrative of History in the Making

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## EDITORIAL

### A Singletax Anniversary.

In honor of the twenty-first anniversary of the first national conference of Singletaxers in the United States, we are devoting much space this week to historical material appropriate to that occasion.

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This is not because we regard Singletax organization as at all important in itself, or very important to the Singletax movement, either as help or hindrance. In that respect as in many other respects we hold with Henry George, who regarded distinctive formal organization as perhaps a little worse than useless except as on occasion it might spring spontaneously out of large popular demands.

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Even then there comes a tendency among members to exalt their organization above their cause. But this is to be borne in such circumstances, as an incident of the larger good or the actual necessity; whereas small organizations made to order by a few persons are fatuous invitations to restrictive creeds, petty authority, unnecessary controversies and obstruction. The first Singletax conference, however, had a legitimate even if temporary reason for being. It gave a common, practical impulse to men and women of like purpose but widely scattered over a large country, and at a time when diverting controversies were rife.

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That fact, and probably that fact alone, together with the model platform it adopted, entitles it to a permanent place in the history of the Singletax movement.

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The ephemeral career of the organization launched by the first national conference does not prove the organization useless in its inception, nor any decline of the cause. Having a function that was in fact soon fulfilled, the organization soon died. For the cause it represented it was doubtless better so, though this the promoters of the organization could not foresee. But the cause itself, so far from dying with the organization, as so many long supposed—some with grief and others with gratitude,—went on growing in other and better ways than through a narrowing organization. Its seeds have consequently begun now to sprout in the social mind of civilized peoples the world over. Other causes may boast of large membership, and point justly and hopefully to a wide and broadening recognition of the evils they denounce; but the Singletax cause, without membership rolls and without efforts to make any, can point not alone to common recognition of those evils, which it likewise denounces, but also to common tendencies, marked and progressive, toward the actual adoption of its constructive principles and plans.

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If Great Britain, Germany, Australia, New Zealand and Canada may be cited as engaged in experimenting along Singletax lines, and two States of our own country, Oregon and Missouri, as preparing to begin the experiment here, while in most of the other States public opinion is likewise ripening, all this is because the Singletax movement has everywhere given less energy to organizing itself than to thoughtful activities in other organizations. Personal promotion of the cause itself, without responsibility to conferences and conventions and committees, has gone on everywhere. In political parties, in churches and clubs and fraternal societies, in tax offices and legislatures and Congress and parliaments and newspaper sanctums, unlabeled Singletaxers have been intelligently industrious, planting seed in their several ways; and those that have resorted to organization have made organization an instrument and not a master, a working committee rather than a seat of power, a broad, co-operative influence and not a segregated band. This has not indeed fattened the membership rolls of any Singletax cult, nor put Singletax

labels upon the men it has influenced. It has done more than that and better than that. In thousands of thought centers it has set thought a-flowing unobstructedly in the direction of the great industrial revolution which the Singletax contemplates and which nothing short of the Singletax in its fullness can accomplish.

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One of the landmarks of such a movement is worth commemorating. It is worth while not alone to those Singletaxers who may incline to look back to these historic beginnings somewhat worshipfully, but also to whoever aspires to the same social goal as Singletaxers, albeit in different and it may be in various forms, and by other methods; and it is worth while to "the man in the street" who, his "nine days of blindness" over, has begun to see truths crudely, even as men were seen by the blind man of Bethsaida "like trees walking." And what better supplement to The Public could we offer in this connection than the portrait of Henry George as he appeared in the fullness of his physical and mental powers at the time, or not long before it, of the meeting of the Conference whose twenty-first birthday we commemorate? Every copy of The Public of this issue must contain this portrait supplement to be complete. It was made by Schaidner, a well-known photographer of Harlem (one of the annexed villages of New York), in the eighties, and was put on sale by The Standard, while William T. Crossdale was the editor, in photogravure form at about the time of the Conference. Another highly appropriate feature of this edition of The Public is a condensation of the Singletax speech of Henry George, Jr., in Congress. Hardly more than a youth at the time of the first Singletax conference, Henry George, Jr., was one of its members. His portrait appears in the Conference group of which we reproduce the middle section. He was elected to Congress as a Democrat nearly a year ago, from an unusually large and overwhelming Republican district, defeating the sitting member—and as a Democrat of the democratic, free trade and Singletax variety. Beyond all cavil he has won his spurs in the national legislature. The speech we quote from was in every way worthy of the son of Henry George, alike for its high order of political tact, its sound and unreserved exposition and application of principle, and its thoughtful and convincing answers to questions. We hope that the full speech may be widely read. Congressman George is about to set out upon a trans-continental lecturing tour, going to the Pacific early in September by northern routes, and return-

ing by southern routes in time for the regular session of Congress.\*

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### The Singletax in New Zealand.

When the first Singletax conference met in New York, twenty-one years ago, New Zealand had just begun experimenting with the Singletax for municipalities. This tendency had been already created by land legislation, some of it fiscal, with a view to breaking up large holdings; but the distinctive Singletax method came in with the local option tax law, under which nearly a hundred municipalities, both urban and agricultural, have adopted for local purposes land value taxation exclusively. All that its advocates have predicted for it as a superior fiscal measure has been realized in these New Zealand municipalities. Its industrial advantages also have been demonstrated; but the tax rate is as yet too low to accomplish the great desideratum of abolishing landlordism.

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### The Singletax in Australia.

Both in the Australian Commonwealth and in its States, Singletax experimentation has moved rapidly in the past ten years. As to municipal taxation the example of New Zealand has been followed, with variations calculated to make it more mandatory. In every respect it has proved its superiority as a method of raising public revenues; and in many respects, notwithstanding the low tax rate, it has demonstrated its possibilities as an industrial or social reform.

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### The Singletax in Great Britain.

More important than anything actually accomplished in Great Britain has been the general agitation against landlordism which the land value taxes of the Lloyd-George budget of 1910 aroused throughout the United Kingdom. All vacant land (formerly exempt) must pay one cent in taxes on every five dollars of capital value. This is a small tax. Land values in the United States pay from two to four or five times as much—in our real estate tax, which falls upon land and improvements indiscriminately. But it is to be remembered that vacant land has paid no appreciable tax in Great Britain in modern times, from which it follows that even one cent in five dollars—about 2 mills

\*Arrangements for Congressman George's lectures are in the hands of the Henry George Lecture Association (Frederick H. Monroe, manager), which has authority to make appointments for him en route. The address of this Association is room 802, No. 538 S. Dearborn Street, Chicago. Copies of his Congressional speech may be had of Daniel Kiefer, Chairman of the Fels Fund, Cincinnati, Ohio.

in the dollar—will tend to force valuable holdings into the market and thereby stimulate improvement and employment. It will have a greater effect in that respect in Great Britain, where land values are more stable, than 2 mills extra would have in this country where values rise so readily as to encourage much speculative holding. Besides the taxes on vacant land in Great Britain, there are a variety of other land value taxes, including 20 per cent on "unearned increment"—on the difference, that is, between the capital value of a holding at one period and its larger capital value at a later period. These periods are variously determined.

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### The Singletax in Germany.

Germany made a crude Singletax experiment in the German colony of Kiaouchou, China, as long ago as 1898 or 1899, and with such satisfactory results that the idea has a grip now in the home country. During a period of eight or ten years German cities have been collecting "unearned increment" taxes for local purposes, and the Imperial government has within a year or two also turned to this source of revenue. The method is crude, but the purpose is manifest. And the effect is inevitable—a strong tendency, not so strong as in Great Britain perhaps, but very strong and growing stronger, in the direction of the total abolition of German landlordism.

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### The Singletax in France and Spain.

While no general movement of a Singletax character distinctively has as yet developed in either France or Spain, tendencies in that direction are affecting the public mind. In Spain this has found expression in efforts to substitute land value taxes for octroi tariffs, and Antonio Albendin (Calle Mendez Nunez 21, Ronda, Andalucia, Spain) has found encouragement in utilizing this reform as a leverage for promoting Singletax progress. Mr. Albendin is also in the effort to form a Spanish League for the Singletax. In France there are individual indications of a tendency toward recognition of the Singletax idea, which Georges Darien (3, Rue de Furstenberg, Paris, France) has undertaken to stimulate through his able and brilliant monthly magazine, *La Revue de l'Impot Unique*, and by means of a French League for the Singletax.

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### The Singletax in Denmark.

Most notable of all the countries of Continental Europe for Singletax progress is Denmark, where

the small farmers have united with workingmen to secure exemptions of industry and the substitution of exclusive taxation of land values. The "Cottagers'" organization—the "Grange" as we perhaps should call it here; the organized farmers, that is, who farm farms instead of farming farmers—is, in co-operation with trade unions, effectively moving on toward the Singletax. Not only are they moving toward it, but they know what it is and are working earnestly and with good hope to get it.

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#### The Singletax in Canada.

A trend toward the Singletax in Canadian municipalities has been visible for several years, but only recently has it advanced so far as to attract general attention. For this the city of Vancouver is responsible. About a year and a half ago, Vancouver, taking advantage of a statute of the Province of British Columbia, of which Vancouver is one of the large cities, abolished taxes on improvements. There was an instant forward leap in local prosperity, and Victoria and New Westminster lost no time in following Vancouver's example. Similar tendencies had already begun in municipalities of the newer Provinces of Canada, notably at Edmonton, Province of Alberta; and these derived fresh impetus from the experience of Vancouver. Since then the idea of exempting improvements and taxing land values exclusively, has made its way eastward across Canada, until it has found official expression in the City Council of St. John, New Brunswick. The low rate on land values still exposes Canadian municipalities to the ravages of landlordism; but this danger may now be easily averted by raising valuations or increasing rates.

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#### The Singletax in the United States.

In most of the States where Singletax sentiment is influential, State constitutions stand in the way of adopting this reform, and until the election of last fall the laws of every State prevented its adoption by municipalities. Thomas G. Shearman started a movement in New York as long ago as 1889 for permitting counties to adopt it, but over this entire period, no legislature of that State has yielded to the pleas of Mr. Shearman or of his associates and successors. But in Oregon last fall, thanks to the People's Power Constitution of that State, the people secured this local option right for their counties, by means of an Initiative petition. Efforts are making in behalf of landlordism, from outside the State as well as within it, to reverse that vote at the next election; but a

movement is nevertheless under way to bring the question of exempting improvements and taxing only land values, to a vote next year in every Oregon county. A similar movement is reported from Seattle. In Missouri a Constitutional amendment progressively abolishing all taxes on improvements, business, etc., and taxing land values alone, is to be brought to vote next year under the Initiative and Referendum powers of the people of that State. In other parts of the Union, although very important preparatory work is under way, the practical movement is either confined to indirect activities, or awaiting results in Missouri and Oregon; or else it is devoting its energies to secure that electoral mechanism the possession of which makes the Missouri and Oregon campaigns possible.

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#### The Singletax and the Fels Fund.

It is no empty compliment to an individual to credit Joseph Fels with having contributed in extraordinary degree and with extraordinary success to the leap forward which the Singletax movement has taken in the past three years. In the receipt of a large income, much of which he attributes to predatory economic institutions, he is financing campaigns for putting an end to incomes so acquired. To this mission he devotes money that others devote to plutocratic pleasures or ineffective philanthropies. Nor is it money alone that he gives; the man himself goes with his money. In Great Britain, Germany, Denmark, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, Joseph Fels (with the full sympathy and co-operation of his wife, and as a substitute for expensive personal pleasures and whims) finances and personally promotes the Singletax movement, visiting these spheres of his activities once a year—except Australia and New Zealand, which are too far away. And results are what he asks for. So also of the United States.

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Nearly three years ago Mr. Fels endowed the Fels Fund here with the object of securing the Singletax somewhere in this country in five years. His terms were merely that competent men should be appointed on the executive commission, and that every dollar contributed by him be matched with another contributed by the people here. An ideal commission was chosen: Daniel Kiefer (chairman) of Cincinnati, and Lincoln Steffens of Connecticut, Frederic C. Howe of Ohio, Jackson H. Ralston of Washington (D. C.), and George A. Briggs of Indiana. Mr. Fels offers \$25,000 a year—\$50,000 if so much is matched with other

contributions—in order to enable the executive commission to do its work. Although his endowment has not yet been fully doubled, contributions besides his own have far exceeded in number and amount any ever before made to the Singletax cause in the United States. As a result, the people of this country are moving rapidly on to the point of realizing Mr. Fels' original object of putting the Singletax in operation somewhere in the United States by 1914.\*

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### Hostile Testimony to Singletax Progress.

One of the interesting evidences of Singletax progress is that which some of its more thoughtful but imprudent adversaries unwittingly furnish. Take, for instance, the movement for the relief of congestion in New York City, under the leadership of Benjamin C. Marsh† as executive secretary of the Committee on Congestion of Population in New York. This movement has before the legislature of New York a bill that would reduce taxes on buildings, relatively to sites, in New York City by one-half. That is, a building would be taxed only half as much as its site, their values being the same, or of a vacant lot of equal value. It is essentially the Vancouver plan, as far as it goes; and the exemption is to be progressive—a reduction of taxes on buildings in such equal amounts annually as to bring about the complete 50 per cent exemption of improvements with the fifth year. No one attempts to argue against this congestion reform. Every one of any intelligence at all admits that it would be better than the present system; and nearly everybody admits that it would tend to reduce congestion, as of course it would. But the bill was bitterly fought, and was postponed until the reassembling of the legislature on the 6th of September, and it may be defeated, because—because what, do you suppose? *Because it would be an entering wedge for the Singletax!*

\*

If that is the best kind of fight that New York landlordism can put up, New York landlordism had better quit fighting. A better system of taxation; but don't adopt it, for it would let in the Singletax! A good method for getting rid of congestion in a crowded city; but don't adopt it.

\*Persons wishing to know more about this phase of the Singletax movement should write for information to Daniel Kiefer, Chairman Fels Fund Commission, Cincinnati, Ohio.

†Mr. Marsh may be addressed for information as follows: Benjamin C. Marsh, Executive Secretary, The Committee on Congestion of Population in New York, Room 506, 320 Broadway, New York City.

for it would let in the Singletax! If the Singletax has indeed reached the point of popularity in New York at which it must be guarded against to the extent of opposing improvements in taxation and of clinging to disease-breeding and death-dealing hives for the homes of the poor, there is no use in fighting the Singletax any longer. If a mere halving of taxes on buildings, throwing only that much of their present burden over upon the monopolists of building sites, would open the way for the full Singletax, then the full Singletax is already upon the threshold,—then the feet of the young men are at the door, for the dying body of landlordism lies within. We hope that these fears of land monopolists are well founded; but we should suppose that even so, they themselves would be ashamed to make such an appeal. Think of it! In the face of congested conditions which enrich them at the expense of the labor and the lives of their brethren, they oppose an ameliorative measure because it would be an entering wedge for the Singletax!

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### WILLIAM THOMAS CROASDALE.\*

William Thomas Croasdale has been dead twenty years, yet those who knew and loved the man can hardly think of him as other than alive. So vigorous was his personality, so strong the impact of his mind and character upon those with whom he came in daily contact, that all such must remember him to their dying day as one of the most vivid incidents of their experience.

His life was comparatively short, without striking incident or startling adventure; and measured by merely material standards, without considerable success. Judged, however, by the impress he made upon those about him, by his practical usefulness to the Singletax movement and other public causes, by the energy with which he thought and wrought, Croasdale's life was one of distin-

\*This editorial is by a Boston newspaper man and publicist, Edward N. Vallandigham, who was an editorial associate of Mr. Croasdale's on the *Wilmington Evening* in the early eighties, and an editorial writer for *The Standard* at the time of Mr. Croasdale's death. The medallion of Mr. Croasdale, of which a photograph appears in the body of the article, is by Mr. Croasdale's friend, E. Stuart Hinton, now of Chicago, the sculptor who modeled a bust of Mr. Croasdale for the Reform Club of New York City in 1892, a plaster replica of which is owned by the Manhattan Single Tax Club. Mr. Hinton's medallion is an excellent likeness and full of character. For the fine photograph of it we are indebted to Alfred Cox (935 McClurg Building, Chicago), a photographer of many distinguished persons, who is justly famous for the painter-like quality of his photographic portraits. Platinum copies, 7 inches by 9 inches (loose-mounted on rough gray paper sheets), may be had of him for two dollars each, postpaid.