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# The Single Tax Review

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## Current Comment

**S**INGLE Taxers owe it to their cause to decline participation in the maudlin sympathy which is enlisted by every insane or violent attempt to destroy rather than to rebuild existing institutions.

**I**T should be remembered that ours is a movement which urges an economic society based on the natural order. It is to be brought about by an appeal to reason; it depends for its success on the orderly processes of society, and is to be attained through the ballot. It is doubtful if revolution under the most promising auspices would give it to us; the forces that revolution brings uppermost are not those on which dependence is to be placed, or to whom we can look for the kind of reorganization that seeks a permanent basis in the natural law of society.

**F**OR this reason, sympathy for the I. W. W., physical force anarchism, sabotage, violent trades unionism, bolshevism, and all their evil brood, are utterly foreign to us. They make as little for the goal we have in view as the oppression and privilege out of which they are born. Their origin is the same—their appeal is to the same evil parent. For the oppression they would substitute is the oppression of their class—and is quite as hateful.

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**T**HE British elections which have resulted in a victory for Lloyd George and the coalition, have some compensating advantages. All those tinged with pacificism have gone down to defeat; among them Henderson and Snowden. The new government will face an electorate which will not be satisfied with tory measures of reconstruction, and it is difficult to see how the elements can be held together for long. Unless Lloyd George has determined to abandon altogether his early professions he must soon challenge his tory associates to a duel to the death on principles, the application of which their class must resist or themselves pass away. But whether they will swallow or be swallowed, is a matter of conjecture in which one man's guess seems as good as another's.

**T**HAT there is little to be hoped for from the Labor men of Great Britain who are lined up with Henderson and his impossible programme, seems clear. George Barnes, the Labor member of the War Cabinet, is out with a proposal that out-Herods Herod, or in this case out-Hendersons Henderson. His suggestion for an inter-

national wage minimum as a matter for consideration by the peace Conference is made in all seriousness. He is quoted as saying: "In a word, we desire to adopt the principle laid down by Gompers, that labor shall no longer be treated as a commodity, but shall be the first charge on production before rent, interest on capital or profits."

**M**AYBE it will be profitable to take Mr. Barnes seriously. He perceives the fundamental truth that human labor is the one absolutely essential factor to the production of wealth—that is, in the transforming of the raw materials of the world into particular things needed for the satisfaction of human wants. But economically it is not possible to put labor "before" rent. Rent is the value which comes to certain sites because labor can be more profitably employed thereon than on other sites. It comes because in the present order of things all labor cannot be profitably employed on equally advantageous sites. Therefore, the Single Tax proposes to equalize these advantages by taking for public uses whatever advantage inheres in one site over another. Thus, while it is impracticable to have all returns to labor "come ahead" of "rent", it is quite possible to have labor share in the rent fund.

**H**ENRY George in his epoch-making "Progress and Poverty" says: "At the beginning of this marvelous era it was natural to expect, and it was expected, that labor-saving inventions would lighten the toil and improve the condition of labor; that the enormous increase in the power of producing wealth would make real poverty a thing of the past." And again he says: "It is true that disappointment has followed disappointment, and that discovery after discovery and invention after invention, have neither lessened the toil of those who most need respite, nor brought plenty to the poor."

Newton D. Baker, in *Everybody's Magazine* of recent date, says: "Has all the mechanical development of recent years really advanced us? Has this great civilization of ours built up on machinery, really meant our refinement? Have all these great inventions of manufacture, conquest of the air and sea, of distance, and even of time itself, been of real benefit to us?"

**M**R. Baker is trying to say the same thing that Henry George said, and succeeds in saying it, though not nearly so well. The Secretary of War is supposed to be a Single Taxer, was a convert of Tom L. Johnson, but if we gather correctly from an interview with him printed in *Collier's Weekly* he is a believer in the Single Tax but not in favor of its adoption, like the traditional Maine

prohibitionist who was in favor of the law but "agin" its enforcement. Yet Mr. Baker has suggested the inquiry, and it is hardly fair to his readers not to furnish the answer. Mr. George wrote a book to explain why all this wonderful mechanical progress had not been of real or adequate benefit to society. Mr. Baker has read the book. He elects to write an essay for a magazine which embodies the inquiry; will he follow it up with a second article embodying the answer? We might suggest that there is good material in "Progress and Poverty" for quite a number of magazine articles from the Secretary; they will not be as good as the original, and a reference to the source might not be out of place, though such an acknowledgement might be a somewhat inconvenient confession for a democratic office-holder. Still, a brave man might risk it.

A CONFERENCE on Housing was held in Boston on November 27-28, and problems and plans were considered. Lawson Purdy's scheme for a self-owned town came in for consideration. Nothing very practical was proposed. One man, a doctor from a Massachusetts town, asked almost in despair: "How can we prevent the rapid and fatal increase in land values in ———?" The inquiry touches the heart of the problem. For the Housing Problem is the Land Problem. We are glad to see that the *Survey* of Dec. 7 commenting on this Housing Conference had this to say:

The land problem was probably more frequently mentioned than at any previous conference. There was very clear indication that people realize the futility of both slum patching and regulative laws unless accompanied by an economic system which will stimulate good home construction. It was stated without opposition that no satisfactory solution of the housing problem can be expected until land seeks use as erected houses seek use, as automobiles and other manufactured machinery and goods seek use. Land speculators and rent profiteers were not handled with the usual amount of tenderness."

THE Real Estate page of the *New York World* contained this gem, which is too good to be lost:

"Early in the field, too, are the Single Taxers. They have been conducting a lively propaganda through all avenues of publicity, including apparently whole-souled fair-play letters to newspaper editors urging that the quickest and sure way to reduce rents would be to tax all of the value out of land, thus compelling owners to abandon it to the city or State."

The charming idiocy of this leaves little to be desired. Has the writer never heard of Sydney, Buenos Aires, and other Australian and South American cities and provinces where the Single Tax is regarded with respect and where its application is already law or in process of being made into law? Bolshevism, the writer calls it. Is Sydney a Bolshevik city? Is Buenos Aires with its million and a half population bolshevist? Has the writer never heard that the taxation of land values for cities had the endorsement of the late Theodore Roosevelt? One more

important inquiry suggests itself. Is the Real Estate page of a New York daily published in the interest of the legitimate business of real estate, or only of those who, interested in real estate speculation and speculation in vacant land, would strangle the industry of house-building, house-selling and house-renting—which really comprise ninety per cent. of what is called the real estate business. The real estate business, like every other, is at the mercy of parasitic interests which thrive on the system which exempts idleness and privilege and taxes productive human effort.

## The Secretary of the Navy on Taxation

THE popular Secretary of the Navy ventured the other evening to navigate the treacherous and unfamiliar seas of economics. Addressing the National Popular Government League, Mr. Daniels is reported to have referred to the problems of taxation as follows:—

"Our readjustment must be attended with vigilance, lest the burdens of war shall be transferred to the consuming many.

"Already there is a well-concerted policy of securing Federal taxation which would reduce the part which wealth must pay. The pleas which will be made for transference of these burdens will be many. They will be put up in smooth-looking capsules. The Junkers, who are resolved that taxation shall be light on those who made big money out of the war, are past masters in camouflage. The people must sleep with both eyes open, if they would defeat the purpose to shift war taxes from the few to the many."

Frankly speaking, platitudes and vague insinuations such as the above have little discoverable meaning and lead nowhere. They would scarcely grace the lips of a demagogue. They come with less grace from a member of the Government which has as yet entered no protest, and taken no action, against the colossal scandal of our fiscal legislation, which, in the Federal sphere, practically exonerates from National taxation the vast landed property interests of this country, the ultimate beneficiaries of the incalculable social values created by the presence, labor and progress of a hundred million people.

The people are fed up with phrases and want action. Under the steady flow of verbal exuberance from members of the Federal Government, the blessed word Democracy is in danger of being confounded with its windy imitation, Demagoguery.

We shall be reminded that the Secretary of the Navy is not responsible for the Government programme of Federal taxation. But, as we cannot conceive of a divided ministry, i.e., of the Secretary of the Navy in the attitude of a critic of the actions of his colleagues, we must infer that his words reflect faithfully the fiscal views and orientation of the Secretary of the Treasury.