

# The Single Tax Review

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## Current Comment

**T**HERE is a significant paragraph in Henry George's "Social Problems:" "We cannot safely leave politics to politicians, or political economy to college professors. The people themselves must think, because the people alone can act."

**T**HIS is what we have been doing so long to the injury of the movement, "leaving politics to the politicians." We thought we could trust the politics of the Single Tax movement to the Democratic politicians, or the politicians of the many new parties as they arose. Now we are going to abandon this practice. We have taken over the politics of the movement—the machinery by which the people may act, and Henry George has told us that the people alone can act. They act through the machinery of elections and by the ballot.

**M**ANY who have hitherto opposed political party action by Single Taxers have based such opposition on the ground that the time was not yet ripe. No other argument was so convincing. But it contained the admission that the time would some day be ripe. We were sometimes told that parties grew, that they were not made, that they did not spring full-armed like Minerva from the head of Jupiter. And they do not. But parties are aggregations of individuals; they meet together and organize. Single Taxers have therefore done what most Single Taxers have admitted must some day be done. The question of the ripeness of the time is determined by the hearty response which this new movement is meeting among the rank and file.

**T**HAT the movement is ripe, or opportune, is coming more and more to be demonstrated. There is the failure or comparative failure of forty years of propaganda; the breaking down or disappearance of organizations and Single Tax clubs everywhere; the persistent misdirection of the movement by unrepresentative associations; the wicked waste of Single Tax money to advance the political interests of aspiring Single Tax politicians; the association of this great movement for human emancipation with petty reforms enlisting the activities of Single Tax groups, owing usually to the want of something better to do; the confusion arising in the public mind with this movement of ours and tax reform movements of little or no importance to the great plan of making men free. And much more. This is why the time is "ripe."

**P**ROGRESS, of Melbourne, is determined to prove President Wilson a free trader, even in spite of President Wilson. It gives an account of an early College debate in which Mr. Wilson refused to take the protectionists' side;

it quotes his speech accepting the Democratic nomination, and comes down to the Fourteen Points, one of which provides for "The removal as far as possible of all economic barriers." As Mr. Wilson has denied the implication which these words seem to convey, it is idle to urge them in support of the contention that Mr. Wilson meant what he seems to have meant. His recent message was not a free trade but a protectionist message.

**T**HERE is one trouble with Mr. Wilson. He has a large vocabulary which is made to serve on occasion the office of ideas. His is the professorial defect, with all and despite his great qualities. He is capable of a masterly thesis on either side of any great question. But so wonderful is his flow of words that they overwhelm him. He forgets all about the idea he may have started with.

**O**NE is conscious in reading Mr. Wilson of the impression of a lot of bricks, solid in appearance, and of various shapes and dimensions, yet lacking something of the cement of thought to hold them together. They present the appearance of a pile, not a structure.

**Y**ET there is a quality of singular persuasiveness about the man. He has persuaded our Australian exchange, in spite of his own disavowal, expressed or implied, that he is a free trader. He has convinced some Single Taxers that he is a Single Taxer. He has convinced a variety of people of a vast variety of things. And the man Wilson, for all his usefulness in the world-crisis (and we do not seek to minimize it) stands yet unrevealed.

**I**S this country under a democracy composed on one side of Southern Bourbons, and on the other of Northern "doughfaces," as they used to be called in ante-bellum days, destined to become the one reactionary country in the world? It seems by no means improbable. How little we have profited from the labors of two decades, from 1896 when Single Taxers campaigned for Bryan, down to the present? We have succeeded in a way. Not only are the Democrats in power, but large numbers of Single Taxers are in office. Never was there a time when so many professed believers in Henry George's economic programme held official positions of responsibility.

**T**RULY here is the millenium we strove for through so many campaigns and so many years. We have succeeded beyond our expectations. Are we happy? We are not. Let us say now that there are enough Single Taxers in Washington who if they got together and issued an appeal to the country—say, like the appeals that they used to make when they were out of office—to cause a political and economic revolution.

WILL they do it? They will not. They are under no obligation to do it. They went into office as Democrats, not as Single Taxers. They did not fool themselves and they were not trying to fool anybody. It was we who fooled ourselves. We had the wrong political psychology, that is all. We still have it, though in a greatly diminished measure. We meet it every now and then when we are told: "These men are only waiting their opportunity. Be patient. They are advocating measures they know to be all wrong, but which they support in order to obtain favor with the people and get their confidence. Then they will seize the propitious time to put over the Single Tax." Oh, ye of boundless faith!

NOR are we inclined to blame them, these Single Taxers in office, if they exhibit a certain subserviency to prevailing beliefs—we mean prevailing official beliefs. We do not expect the same vigor of utterance from these men in office as out of office. We know how they sprang to attention when told that the world was to be made safe for democracy. But to give reasons how America may be made safe for democracy calls for a different set of principles not yet officially recognized.

AND so it may come about that America with liberals (so-called) and radicals (formerly named) and Single Taxers (Single Tax Democrats) occupying official positions in a party of Southern Bourbons and Northern "dough-faces," may yet make this country the one reactionary country in the world. We mean the one reactionary country among English speaking races, since Single Taxers in Great Britain are not governed by the same political timidity. In language that burns they arraign Lloyd George for a betrayal of the principles for which he once stood. They do not say, "Let us support George now, and trust him to return to the doctrines he avowed a few years ago. His position at the head of a coalition government is such that he must remain quiet on the great issue of the land for the people. He only awaits his opportunity." No such counsels are heard. The Single Taxers of Great Britain would not hesitate to characterize Mr. Lane's scheme of land settlement for the returned soldier in the way we have characterized it—as a miserable subterfuge which should arouse our indignation and scorn. Let us quote *Land Values* as proof, that solid organ of the Single Taxers of Great Britain: "Is not the land worth fighting for? The proud soldier in the picture pointed to the land as if it were his. The Prime Minister's announcement during the General Elections, of which Lord Lee sharply reminds him (*i.e.*, Lloyd George's statement that full market value must be paid in full and in cash to expropriated landowners) is an open declaration that what the soldier went out to save never belonged to any one but the landowner. It can only be transferred in exchange for new burdens on labor and industry."

THIS is the kind of language Secretary Lane would hear were he a member of the British government. What does he hear from the Single Taxers of this country? For

the most part, apologies and explanations. We seem to have lost the courage to openly condemn anything or anybody once labelled or reputed Single Tax. Fair words and broken promises do not anger us any more. We have lost the faculty of active opposition to anything. We have joined the pacifist ranks of the Northern "doughfaces."

## The So-Called Luxury Tax

THE Luxury or Stamp Tax recently imposed by Congress is proving an excellent instrument of elementary popular education in fiscal procedure. The following comment on a similar Canadian law applies almost textually to its American imitation. We quote from an article written for the *Canadian Grocer*, by E. M. Trowern, Secretary of Dominion Executive Council and Dominion Board of Retail Merchants' Association of Canada:

"Where the tax is paid by retail merchants buying war tax stamps and placing them upon packages, according to the selling price of the article, we are informed on reliable authority that sixty-two and two-thirds per cent. of this tax goes to the Government officials for collecting it, and that the Government only receives thirty-seven and one-third as its share."

"As business men, we consider that this is by no means a satisfactory system of taxation, and we are sure that no business house would tolerate any such expensive and extravagant a system as this one.

"The full cost of collection, however, is not included in the sixty-two and two-thirds per cent. as reported by the Government. There is the further cost to the retail merchant of purchasing the stamps and placing them upon each article, and collecting the same from the customer. This is all additional to the sixty-two and two-thirds per cent., the only difference being that the retail merchant does an enormous amount of work and he receives nothing whatsoever for his services.

"If by any chance a stamp falls off the package, or the retail merchant or his clerk neglects to attach it, and a Government Inspector happens to enter his store, the retail merchant is summoned to the Police Court, and the usual fine is fifty dollars and costs. . . . The retail merchant, therefore, does all the work in buying and collecting the revenue, and receives no reward, only the risk of being fined in the Police Court if he or his clerk makes one miss in a thousand times. On the other hand, the Government Inspector, in addition to receiving his salary and expenses for traveling all over the country and spying on the retail merchants, receives a portion of the fine. . . .

"These facts are presented to show that the system is absolutely wrong in principle as well as in practice; and it should be changed at once, otherwise the entire commercial community will be aroused from one end of Canada to the other."

It seems to us that the business community and productive elements of society generally will always be exposed to the annoyance and expense of half-witted, freak legisla-