

# The Single Tax Review

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## Current Comment

IT does not occur to the average man that we have heard rather too much of the high cost of living. High prices, at least as they affect current operations, if wages and salaries rise commensurately, are matters of small importance. The matter is a serious one, however, for those who have money in savings banks or who subsist on fixed incomes.

But the evils of the high cost of living are accentuated by the conditions which affect labor at all times. Wages do not rise naturally, as they would under normal conditions. They can only be forced up by methods of compulsion, since the natural force is lacking. This artificial compulsion, forcing up wages, tends again to force up prices, and we are thus within the toils of a vicious circle.

THE high cost of living due to currency inflation and a bad system of finance is with us. So, too, are all the elements of economic maladjustment that were with us before the era of high prices. Were the economic forces allowed to work without interruption or obstacle high prices would not mean high cost of living. There would be an economic readjustment in a general equalization and with small inconvenience.

But with the opening up of all natural resources by the Single Tax, with wages no longer forced downward by the unfair competition in the labor market through the denial to labor of free access to these opportunities, the tendency of prices would be constantly downward, and wages—measured in the only way we need measure them, in actual product—as constantly upward. Production would be enormously increased by the removal of taxation now resting as a dead weight upon industry.

THE Single Tax is the sovereign remedy for the high cost of living. It is not a temporary palliative—it does not call for increased machinery of government. The true way to restore the equilibrium between wages and prices, and to do it permanently, is to cease the flow of unearned wealth to those who exact tribute for the use of land, or who hold vast tracts of it out of use for the speculative value that they some day hope to reap; cease the penalizing of industry, and establish the natural order in which the separate factors in production, Land, Labor and Capital, may work without interruption and without obstacle.

The remedy is absurdly simple. It is so simple that we miss it in our desire to correct each manifestation of an apparently complex economic disorder. After the superficial manner of the Socialists we begin to apply to these disorders the various devices of control and regulation. The purblind statesmen at Washington see no other remedy. Wilson himself, in recommendations that contradict his

very vague preachments, which by implication seem to point to the true solution, indicates a programme of regulation and control which leaves the real source of monopoly untouched. Nowhere in all the confusion of tongues among the extraordinary conglomerate of opinions supposed to be represented at Washington, is there a voice raised for even a moderate application of those principles preached in this country for forty years by the disciples of Henry George, some of whom, an unusual number in fact, are in positions of power and influence at the national capital.

THAT splendid organ, *Land and Liberty*, is not pleased with Mr. Asquith. It quotes the following brave words: "I have said over and over again, and I used to think that I had the universal assent of Liberals in all sections and complexions, that the question of the terms upon which land is to be acquired for the benefit of the community lies at the root of all social reform." At Edinburgh he said: "All Scottish Liberals will be agreed that the time is over when land rated for local purposes at one value can only be purchased at another and higher value when required for public purposes." A month later Mr. Asquith told a London audience that the land acquired for public purposes "must be on the same scale of valuation at which it is assessed for public burdens." *Land and Liberty* points out that in Edinburgh the basis of purchase was the assessment for local rating, at London Public burdens, which in the main comprise local rates, Income Tax and Death Duties. The editor asks if the scale of valuation for purchase is to be determined by this combination, or by the local assessment?

Mr. Asquith evidently believes that the land question is "a local issue," as General Hancock said of the tariff. *Land and Liberty* asks with justifiable indignation: "Why cannot this master of English say without equivocation what he means. What does it matter for the purpose what Scottish Liberals are agreed upon, or what London Liberals think on the subject? We know very well what some of them think of this pussyfooting on the part of their nominal leader. . . . Meanwhile the words written across the portals of the Liberal Party might very well be: Abandon hope all ye who enter in with any idea that Liberalism means Taxation of Land Values." A certain tenderness for Single Taxers who hold office in the Democratic Party in this country, or who still support that party, deters us from making similar application of the legend which Dante placed over the portals of the place not mentionable to polite ears. We do not quite despair that some Single Taxer of political prominence may yet be able to read the same inscription over the portals of the Democratic Party. But will he have the courage of John Paul to read it aloud?

FROM a volume entitled "Reconstructing America," published by the Page Company, of Boston, we cull a few opinions of prominent men in public life regarding plans of social and industrial reconstruction. We have been greatly impressed with what might be termed the lingual facility of many of these statements. First, we have President Wilson, one of the greatest living masters of what may be called, to coin a collocation, the "rhetorical resound." We quote:

"Ever since the history of liberty began men have talked about their rights, and it has taken several hundred years to perceive that the principal condition of right is duty, and that unless a man performs his full duty he is entitled to no right. It is a fine correlation of the influence of that duty that right is the equipoise and balance of society."

Not bad, though a little trite. Josephus Daniels, always an optimist, has this to say:

"The world after peace will not go back to conditions such as existed before our entrance into the mighty struggle. The people will take on new dignity. What labor earns will find its way into the pocket of labor. Statesmen of vision will create new opportunities for American commerce and guaranty to labor the bread it has earned. Political shibboleths that men heeded in 1916 are as dead as the mummies of Egypt, and public men who try to galvanize them into life will be interred in the catacombs that overlook the Salt River."

This is all very delightful, and no doubt Mr. Daniels can tell us how it will come to pass. Another member of the Cabinet, Hon. David L. Houston, Secretary of Agriculture, says:

"It is particularly vital that the process of acquiring ownership of farms be encouraged and hastened. This is now in process. Tenancy has its dark side, but it has also its bright side. In no inconsiderable measure it is a step toward ownership. It is a stage through which many of our owners have passed and are passing."

This is easily the gem of the collection. That tenancy is a "stage" on the way to ownership ought to set at rest any prevalent discontent with the growth of farm tenancy. And if the process of acquiring ownership of farms is now in progress and is aided and encouraged by anything that the government has done, we have not heard of it. The only thing that will permanently add to the growth of farm ownership is a policy that will destroy speculation in land and relieve the farmer of the burdens of taxation that he is compelled to bear. Has this administration shown the slightest tendency to adopt such measures? In all the need for extraordinary revenue that has arisen has any one in this cabinet of rhetoricians and optimists suggested a Federal Land Tax? Three of them are said to be Single Taxers, and President Wilson is suspected of many benevolent intentions. Yet while they have talked and talked and talked, Australia, under a protectionist premier, has led the way with a Federal Land Tax.

AT the bottom of everything lies the one primal instinct of home. Since the beginning of time the affairs of the world have been guided by this one primal instinct. Back

of every war was this one element." "Give your home instinct a chance." So reads a real estate advertisement in the *Cleveland Plaindealer*. Sounds nice, doesn't it? "Give the home instinct a chance." Indeed, that is a portentous text. Are we willing to introduce such changes in our land and tax systems as will enable every man to gratify this instinct? For it is indeed all that the *Plaindealer* says it is. The difficulty of gratifying it is responsible for most of the misery, poverty and social revolutions in the world. It is indeed of all instincts the most beneficent, and the obstacles that lie in the way of its gratification are of all things the most fraught with danger to civilization and mankind.

THE *Washington Herald*, under the grewsome title, "How Shall We Kill Little Babies," asks, "Is it worse to kill little babies with an axe than with a tenement house?" It thinks that part of the suffering is probably unavoidable and that another part is due to selfishness and greed of landlords and house owners. In both of these suppositions the *Herald* is in error. The suffering is easily avoidable and is not due to the selfishness of landlords, but to the blundering incapacity of our lawmakers to whom the remedy has been pointed out these many years.

Crowding many people on a little land has been made profitable by the laws that permit speculation in land to go on unchecked; and building operations are further hampered by high taxes that weigh heavily upon home builders. As long as land is rendered artificially scarce and homes are made artificially dear, we have two causes constantly and efficiently at work to crowd the poor into narrow quarters and unwholesome and insufficient accommodations. To rail against the selfishness of landlords, who are no more selfish than other people, will get us nowhere.

That the *Herald* recognizes this is shown in an editorial in another issue, under the significant title, "Their Land and Your Living." It says, speaking of "cut over" land, land from which the marketable timber has been removed, and which is now covered with brush and stump:

"Wherever the timber cutter has hewed his way there is the idle cut-over land, the land hog waiting for unearned land profit, and in the wake of all there is less food and high cost of living for the eaters of food."

## The Big Problem

JUST think of men who were in the Argonne, who retain mental pictures of the heaps of their dead comrades, coming home to be drugged, to see themselves unable to get a home for themselves. You know what that realization breeds—it breeds a spirit we don't want to see in this country. If, on the other hand, you take care of them, you will be breeding patriotism. If you don't, you will bring out a terrible discontent. They have done their work well; we should do ours. There may be tightness in the money market, big contracts may be tied up; but the big problem of 4,000,000 men coming back to civil pursuits must be met."

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