

The Single Tax Review

VOL. XXIII

SEPTEMBER—OCTOBER, 1923

No. 5

Current Comment

THE International Single Tax Conference at Oxford, England, has passed into history. Though representatives of fourteen nations were gathered, no mention of the event appeared in any of the newspapers of the United States. The Oxford papers, the *Chronicle* and the *Times*, favored the conference with elaborate reports in which all the addresses were fairly summarized.

At the opening of the Conference occurred an incident which may be destined to have far-reaching results. We shall depend for its recital on the Oxford *Times* from which we quote as follows:

"The declaration of principle and policy was then put as a resolution, and carried.

Mr. OUTHWAITE moved an amendment that the following words be deleted from the declaration:

"That, to attain this end in the simplest, easiest and most practical way, public revenues be obtained by imposing taxation on the value of land apart from improvements due to private enterprise and expenditure; that such taxation, national and local, be based on a valuation showing the actual market value of each piece of land in separate occupation or suitable for separate occupation irrespective of the improvements in it or upon it, the valuation being made public and being kept up to date by periodic revision; that taxation on land value be payable by each person interested in the value of the land and in proportion to his interest, and be treated as a public rent charge having priority over all other charges; and that an annual tax, levied without exemption on the actual market value on all land at an equal rate per unit of value in substitution for existing taxes on wages, trade, industry and improvements would at once bring about great and beneficial changes in the social and industrial condition of the people." He also moved that the words: "That the complete taxation of land value would provide such public revenue as would render all tariff and restrictive taxes unnecessary" be altered to: "That the complete collection of economic rent," etc. Their concern, he said, was to see if they could not get the slaves themselves to stand for their own emancipation, instead of going to the slave owners and asking them to be kind to their slaves and give them a little liberty. They should take the cause out of the category of rates and taxes, and present it to the people as one for their liberation. They wanted liberty in full, and with the aid of the people they could achieve it.

Mr. MACAULEY (America), seconded the amendment, and a general discussion followed until the Conference adjourned for lunch."

THE amendment was beaten later by a vote of 31 to 80.

A week later the officers of the group known as the Commonwealth League, with Hon. R. L. Outhwaite, former M.P., Mr. Warriner, an American resident in England, John E. Grant, author of that remarkable work, "The Problem of War and Its Solution", W. C. Owen, Dr. Pearson, both writers on economic subjects, J. Graham Pease and others met and organized a party, the first Single Tax Party in England, probably to be known as The Commonwealth Land Party. This meeting was held in a seventeenth century room in Fleet street, London, on the evening of Tuesday, August 28th, in a room known as Prince Henry's Room. A correspondent tells us that it was probably in this room that Prince Henry, who was the son of James II, received the rents of the Duchy of Cornwall, part of which estate is in Westminster. At this gathering of the Commonwealth Committee a meeting was arranged for in the great pottery district of Birmingham, and Mr. Outhwaite announced that he would stand as a candidate of the new party at the first bye-election.

THIS great question of ours (to use the language of Mr. Outhwaite), "will at last be raised out of the category of rates and taxes," and presented as a question of the liberation of the land. This is what we have been trying to do here, and in the success that has attended it the Single Tax Party has been largely instrumental. If the New Commonwealth Land Party can give to the real Georgian principle the emphasis that it so sadly needs in British politics, every Single Taxer will wish it God speed.

THE Single Taxers of Great Britain have looked to the Liberal Party for aid and continue to look to it, despite successive betrayals, thus furnishing an analogy to the experience of American Single Taxers with the delectable democracy from the time of Grover Cleveland to that of Woodrow Wilson.

BY an increasing number it is now perceived that the policy of looking for aid to Liberals and Laborites to advance the cause is a mistake—the same mistake we ourselves have made on this side of the ocean. To Messrs. Outhwaite, Grant, Graham Pease, Warriner and others, those of us who want the standard lifted high, free from "entangling alliances" with political parties, as the great measure that means a new and real human freedom, will look longingly across the Atlantic waters.

WE present in this issue an abridgement of the report from the *Oxford Chronicle* because it contains much of interest to American readers recounted by a reporter who

observed merely what he was sent to record; a more intimate and revealing chapter from Mr. Outhwaite's report of the Conference for the REVIEW; and an article by one of the American delegates, Robert C. Macauley, by common agreement the leader of the American delegation. This, we think, places the facts of the event before our readers and calls for no special number or additional pages for their recital. The Conference was without visible effect upon the organs of public opinion. Outside of the Oxford papers the event passed almost unnoticed in the press of the metropolis and throughout the United Kingdom.

AND now begins a new era in the history of the movement in Great Britain. The scene shifts from II Tothill street, London, to 43 Chancery Lane, now the headquarters of the Commonwealth Land party. Some of our readers will remember that at the time of Lloyd George's introduction of the Budget providing for a tax on land values of a small fraction in the pound, among the brave words that accompanied this proposed fractional installment of liberty, was Churchill's "We are ringing up the curtain on a play that is going to have a long run." Well, it didn't run long. The players did a lot of barnstorming for a period, and then retired from the stage. The curtain was rung down. And then the people who had paid to see the advertised show filed out, and some new political attraction was offered to the cheated and disinherited. Now the great drama is resumed, with a different set of actors, and the curtain will fall only when the last act is finished.

IT is not by homeopathic applications of a land value tax that the situation in England, or indeed anywhere else, can be cured. As for England herself, she is desperately sick. Millions of pounds in doles are being expended for the relief of the unemployed, and the need is increasing; her poverty has grown from an excrescence to a dreadful sore, and is spreading. And as a remedy for this condition she is offered, what? Land restoration? Freedom for the disinherited? No. Only a small tax on land values—the Liberal programme of a Penny in the Pound. Great God! And at such a time and in such a world! Far less, this that is offered her, by many times than obtains in any city in the United States, for in England it may be necessary to state, land bears no taxes at all.

TIME, indeed, Messrs. Members of the United Committee, that some one raised the banner of Land Restoration. The time is ripe—ay, over-ripe—for a new Cobden and Bright to lift the standard of a free earth. The economic rent of land is the People's commonwealth, the land itself is the people's heritage. Who shall say them nay? Who shall postpone the time for the coming of mankind into their inheritance? The time is NOW! Who shall say that liberty, not all at once but in installments,

is the true and only feasible programme—a penny in the pound this year and another penny the next, with starvation outstripping the progress of emancipation!

TO come to the practical side of the matter. One of the members of the United Committee said at the Conference, in substance and almost in these words: "We cannot adopt the name Single Tax for our elections—our tickets here are the Liberal and Labor programmes." Well, one of these programmes is a Penny in the Pound, and the other, compensation to the landlords! Henderson's letter, which we print elsewhere, is an excellent statement, but he is secretary of a party that favors compensation to the landlords—a policy of binding over the slaves for a period of years to the same tribute-takers! Henderson has condemned the Commonwealth League's programme as "confiscation," and Asquith has formally disapproved of what we as Single Taxers stand for. And yet we are told that these are the political leaders British Single Taxers are following, that while we preach the taking of the full economic rent by the people because it is theirs of right, when we come to the practical application of the principle we propose something else—that only a very small part of it be taken, or if we take all of it, the British people shall be condemned to pay for what we have preached insistently these many years belongs to them!

The "Business Cycle," or Permanent Prosperity?

BANKERS, financiers and economists are discussing the business cycle;—the recurrence at frequent intervals of what is termed a period of overproduction, and seem to agree that these cycles are due to decreased purchasing power on the part of the consuming public. To the question why buying power should decrease the economists have varying replies, none of which appears to be more than a superficial explanation. The colored man who said that the earth rests on a tortoise, and the tortoise on a rock, replied to the query: "What does the rock rest on?" with the conclusive rejoinder. "There's rocks all the way down." Much to the same effect is the statement that productive activities depend upon purchasing power; that ability to buy depends upon productive capacity, and that cycles of prosperity and depression run all the way down.

If it is true that the phenomena of industry and trade are governed by natural laws that operate so that as consumers the people are not able to buy back as much wealth as they can and do produce, political economy would indeed be a dismal science. There is, however, no reason for believing that inability of consumption to keep pace with production is a natural or necessary condition. It would be absurd to say that fishermen were unemployed because they had caught too many fish; that grain growers