

A Chicago Paper's Editorial on the New York Single Tax Platform

HENRY GEORGE'S Single Tax plan is probably the greatest policy for human betterment ever enunciated.

Private ownership of land is as illogical and as opposed to public policy as private ownership of water, air, sunlight or other natural elements.

Man has a true title only to that which he creates or which he has acquired by fair barter and exchange. No man can ever acquire an honest title to real estate for the very excellent reason that the Creator never gave anyone a deed. All abstracts begin with seizure.

The system of land titles that allows a man to "own" more than he can use is manifestly opposed to public policy.

The value of land is created by public demand. A large city makes land valuable and the city should receive the values it creates in the form of taxes.

By removing the taxes on industry and thrift and placing all taxes on land values—this policy would force unused land into activity. It would encourage thrift and industry instead of penalizing them as under the present tax system.

The convention of the New York Single Tax Party was in refreshing contrast to that of the old-line parties. The Single Tax Party platform is a rather lengthy document. It demands, as the ultimate aim of the party, that the rental value of land be collected by the State and that "all improvements, industry and enterprise be exempt from taxation." It then outlines the manner in which the taxing power is to be used to attain this end, and in separate sections outlines the effect of the application of the Single Tax upon agriculture, upon labor, upon capital and upon the government.

An entirely new departure is the adoption of a plank declaring opposition to the advocacy by the Socialists of the government ownership and operation of all the means of production and distribution and stigmatizes the socialistic philosophy as an attempt to solve our economic and social evils by resorting to artificial laws, whereas the Single Tax would destroy the causes of these evils by a return to the natural law of free access to the earth and free competition.

Finally, the platform contains a plank dealing with the present crisis, in which the party pledges its candidates to the support of the national government and any measures necessary in the prosecution of the war, but calls the attention of the government and the people to the Single Tax as a means of stimulating the production of raw materials, of raising revenues for the conduct of the war and the redemption of the nation's debt after the war is over, and of the imperative need of opening to the millions of soldiers and sailors, when they shall return from the trenches, the millions of acres of arable farm land, of which there are many million acres situated in New York State alone, and of thus avoiding the period of un-

employment, low wages and hard times which otherwise are likely to follow the demobilization of our armies.

The party hopes to force Single Tax onto the platforms of the big parties.—*Calumet Record*, South Chicago, Ill.

Militant Democracy and Fiscal Reaction

WHEN the fiscal history of this war-time comes to be reviewed, a singular and unworthy phenomenon will have to be recorded of the two great democratic nations of Anglo-Saxon America.

Beyond a few isolated cases in the western provinces of Canada, where a small levy has recently been made upon land held out of cultivation, the fiscal exemption enjoyed by property in land has been maintained. Indeed, in the Canadian provinces of Alberta and British Columbia, where (particularly in municipal areas and for municipal purposes) the fiscal discrimination against the productive use of land had been removed a few years ago, advantage has been taken of a limited property franchise and the enforced absence of the virile part of the population at the battle-front to saddle again upon the user of land an unfair share of taxation. In Vancouver, improvements are again assessed, cautiously, it is true, at 25% of their value; in Edmonton, more boldly, at 60%.

Throughout the rest of Canada and the United States, the privileged fiscal position of inadequately used land has remained unshaken. Practically every useful or useless form and object of production has been loaded with direct, indirect and even duplicated taxation. But in the great world emergency and in the face of the supreme challenge to patriotism and conscience, the private ownership of the nation's natural assets has distinguished itself by no gesture of heroism or self-sacrifice. As we have shown in previous issues of the REVIEW, land-owning interests have not hesitated even to proclaim in the public press this profitable, if inglorious, exemption from national service.

It would be unfair to the perspicacity of our statesmen to suppose them blind to such a scandalous fiscal anomaly. But, assuming their perception of the situation, it leaves us the more difficult and unpleasant task of explaining their silent acquiescence in the iniquity. Not a single initiative of the most timid, tentative nature to remedy this injustice to the nation's economic and financial equilibrium and strength stands to the credit of our national government or of any one of the 48 State governments.

The connivance of all our legislatures seems, indeed, to be pledged to those favored financial interests which exploit this fiscal injustice. We cannot understand otherwise the impunity with which the "safety" of land investments from war claims and other fiscal obligations is featured so largely in the advertisements of leading real estate brokers. They make no effort to conceal the invidious fiscal distinction in their favor.

It will scarcely be argued, in extenuation of our statesmen and legislators that, in the strenuous fine-combing of visible wealth of the country for revenue to meet the mounting demands of public obligations, land values slipped through unobserved, a negligible item. Land is not so hidden, elusive. It is conspicuously the source of all wealth and the material basis of our existence. Its distribution and use are fundamental to efficient production. Land is the one obtrusive material and moral issue that cannot be evaded—honestly—by intelligent men.

Nor can it be claimed that no federal nation has sought revenue from a land tax. The example of the Australian Federation is too well known.

We have, unfortunately, had no statesman to voice for us the real explanation with the frankness of Lloyd George. In the great constitutional crisis of 1909, and at a moment when Britain was called upon to face a vast programme of naval construction, he had the courage to speak plainly to the landed aristocracy about their evasion of national obligations.

He said: "We started our four Dreadnoughts. They cost eight millions of money. We promised them four more; they cost another eight millions. Somebody has got to pay, and then these gentlemen say: 'Perfectly true, somebody has got to pay, but we would rather that somebody were someone else.' We started building; we wanted money to pay for the building; so we sent the hat round. We sent it round amongst workmen; and the miners of Derbyshire and Yorkshire, the weavers of High Peak, and the Scotchmen of Dumfries, who, like all their countrymen, know the value of money—they all dropped in their coppers. We sent round Belgravia, and there has been such a howl ever since that it has deafened us."

It is scarcely possible to believe that our statesmen have been blind to the fiscal immunities of American landed interests. They may have lacked the courage to speak; but we should be sorry to think they, deliberately and of their own volition, connived.

Does any thinking man imagine that such immunities can continue much longer? Has the economic debacle and social upheaval in Europe taught our public men no lesson?

The issue is inevitably coming up for settlement. Militant democracy is not to be defrauded of its elemental rights. The return of the soldier citizen to the country he has fought for will definitely stage the conflict. Fiscal and economic reaction, like autocracy and political privilege, have had their day. The only alternative now to the reign of justice is the rule of anarchy and brute force, of which Europe has already shown us a sample. Is the choice of our statesmen to be for our up-building or for our undoing? Their lack of foresight in the prelude to the present political catastrophe does not lighten the burden of foreboding before the tremendous economic issues now finally demanding settlement.

"A FULLY equipped duke costs as much to keep up as two Dreadnoughts; he is just as great a terror, but he lasts longer."

LLOYD GEORGE.

Later News From California

AT this writing, twenty days after the election, the complete vote on the proposed Single Tax amendment has not been given out. The total vote cast for and against the measure will be about one-half the vote of two years ago. The percentage then was about 31%. This year it may fall to about 25%. Interest in the war and apathy as to everything else help to account for the small vote. The failure of the democratic party to get a man on the ticket for governor accounts for some of the indifference. Governor Stephens is a poor specimen of a progressive and liberals of all shades failed to go to the polls—democratic liberals because the Supreme Court so construed the primary election law that they failed to get their man Francis J. Heney on the ballot, and republican liberals, sometimes called progressives in California, had no candidate in the present governor who got the republican nomination and has become an extreme reactionary since he has been governor, as the successor of Senator Johnson.

The bulk of the Single Tax vote comes from the liberals in the old parties. The antis spent a barrel of money to beat the measure. All the papers, city and county, were heavily subsidized by advertising contracts. The Scripps papers months ago made a profuse pretense of support, but as the campaign advanced, big display advertisements against Single Tax began to appear in the papers, then reading notices, then editorial opposition. The labor papers, too, began to run advertisements against Single Tax and then began to shy away from it, and just before election withheld endorsement or openly opposed it. This was due to the action at the annual meeting of the State Federation of labor at San Diego, which adopted a land policy of its own to the effect that a heavy supertax should be imposed upon all idle land and all land held for speculation.

Organized labor in this State under the control of Paul Scharrenberg is now committed to this plan of reaching the idle land and throwing it open to use, and at the next election will doubtless be in the field with such a measure.

The large vote on the social insurance measure and the heavy majority against it would indicate that thousands of trade unionists did not vote on the Single Tax measure at all, and the action at San Diego on land reform would seem to be the reason.

No. 19 if adopted would doubtless have doubled the tax on every foot of land in California. One potent argument used against the measure was that in large areas of California under costly schemes of irrigation it would be next to impossible to segregate the value of the improvements upon the land from the land itself, and it was argued that as to such lands this question would be thrown into the courts and endless litigation would ensue. As to urban and suburban unimproved land held for speculation, No. 19 would have fallen heavily. As to such lands, the tax now imposed would have been more than doubled, probably quadrupled, and the selling values would have been enormously diminished. This made the land speculators very active indeed in their propaganda against it.