

LAND QUESTION AND THE LABOUR PROBLEM.

THERE is a disposition on the part of many to consider the Taxation of Land Values merely as a fiscal reform. In the first place there are our Socialistic friends who tell us that no alteration of taxation can affect vitally the condition of the workers, thereby implying that a tax on land values is simply in the same category as a tax on income, a tax on sugar, coal, or any other commodity, we use the word commodity because the Socialist's "land" is a commodity— a form of capital almost indistinguishable from other forms.

In the second place, those who advocate the purchase of the land, and the holding of it by the State, generally allude to the Taxation of Land Values as simply a fiscal change, not in any great way tending to break up land monopoly. They generally tell us that what they want is not so much the value of the land as the land itself to be utilised for the benefit of the people.

Then we have a very respectable class of people who see the burden of taxation falling to a greater degree on industry and the industrial classes than upon owners of ground values, and they would like to see a slight readjustment were it for nothing else than to close the mouths of demagogues. This, with a variation on the sacredness of contracts, is part of the burden of the song of the minority report on local taxation.

What they one and all imply is that the taxation of land values will not affect the relations of landed and landless. The third class especially want a very small tax so that if it should have any effect it may not be clearly appreciated by the people. With the others, the wish that the taxation of land values may make no vital change in social conditions is very largely father to the thought that it will not. Let us consider the question. Why is valuable land held out of use or put to inferior uses? Is it not that its increasing value, due to increase of population and extension of industry, adds annually on the average a greater amount than the interest on its sale price will bring? If it is not primarily this, then such landlords are largely commercial fools, keeping land out of use for fun, or in ignorance.

The taxation of land values will make land held out of use, bear the same burden as if it were in use. It will, in a word, tend to destroy land speculation; and the full taxation of land values, which we call "The Single Tax," would destroy land speculation entirely, because, the whole value going to the community, there would be nothing to speculate in. Land values would fall, and the land become

more available to those who want to use it than under any elaborate system of State ownership.

Through cheaper land, the housing problem can alone be solved; for the housing question is not a question of the scarcity of brick, stone, lime, or labour; it is entirely a question of the artificial scarcity of land. Cheaper land, too, would stem the tide of rural migration into the town, lessen the competition for employment, and raise wages. All this is contained in the Single Tax, yet almost every peripatetic Socialist orator, with a single aim at the nationalising of everything, proclaims it a fraud.

What is almost always overlooked and misrepresented is the bearing of the Single Tax on the labour problem. Single Taxmen ask no special privileges, no coddling Acts of Parliament for labour, they merely urge that the taxation of land values would tend to give labour free access to the raw materials of production, without which the labourer is virtually a slave.

Here is in a Government Blue Book a splendid argument on this side of the question. In page 115 of the Report of the Royal Commission, enquiring into the depression in our West Indian Colonies, occurs the following :—

"It must be recollected that the chief outside influence with which the Government of certain colonies have to reckon are the representatives of the sugar estates, that these persons are sometimes not interested in anything but sugar, that the establishment of any other industry is often detrimental to their interests, and that under such conditions it is the special duty of your Majesty's Government to see that the welfare of the general public is not sacrificed to the interests or the supposed interests of a small but influential minority, which has special means of enforcing its wishes and bringing its claims to notice.' In regard, for instance, to opening up access to the land to the labourers, the Commissioners point out how both the coolies and the negroes like to have a little patch of land of their own, and to eke out what they make from that by working on the sugar plantations, but go on to say, ' The settlement of the labourer on the land has not, as a rule, been viewed with favour in the past by the persons interested in sugar estates. What suited them best was a large supply of labourers entirely dependent on being able to find work on the estates, and, consequently, subject to their control, and willing to work at low rates of wages."

Sugar planters are not the only people interested in keeping wages low; it is the end and aim of plutocracy everywhere. In the face of such evidence, the statement that the solution of the land question will not at the same time solve the labour problem is, to say the least, amusing. With free access to land wages must rise. Will access to land make coolies and negroes free and leave the white man the slave of capital?

The land question is the labour question. Man is a land animal, white men and black men are equally land animals, and equally dependent on land. It is the bottom question, and the question the solution of which is precedent to all real progress. Nationalise industries if you will, run cars, trains, operate telephones, telegraph lines, construct water works and sewage works, and the result will be an increase in the values of land. So if you were to conduct all industries, municipally and nationally, as well as these fundamental monopolies, it would just mean increased rent. And the Single Tax simply means the appropriation of this rent for the joint and common benefit of the whole community.