

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT.

POLITICAL PITFALLS

It would be a bold politician who in the United States would publicly disavow belief in democratic forms of government. A few of our newspapers have got almost to that point, but not yet our legislators. They are all democrats, and it is in the name of the people that they create monopolies, establish robber tariffs, or subjugate foreign countries. It is, however, not by words but by acts that men must be judged, and tried by that standard few of them show any real conception of or belief in democracy. Omitting the mere opportunists and office seekers, and they form a large majority of our public representatives, in the remainder there are plutocrats in plenty, aristocrats not a few, here or there a would be autocrat or a transparent demagogue, but not enough sincere and intelligent democrats to salt the lump or give impetus to the easily stamped, mediocre, sheep-like majority.

For the support of this small remnant and for the increase of their number Single Taxers of course must work, for every follower of George is of necessity a democrat, just as every real democrat is, though he may never find it out, a believer in the fundamental principles laid down by George. Not more truly did Thomas Jefferson interpret the democracy of the past than Henry George the democracy of the future. It is not necessary that the men we support should indorse every line of "Progress and Poverty", but it is necessary that they should share its spirit, its devotion to free institutions, its belief in human capacity for self-government, its passion for justice.

Against this spirit many strong forces are arrayed. There is first plutocracy, which triumphed so signally in 1896 and 1900, with its lying brags of commercial honesty and its sordid promise of full dinner-pails. In its train came national dishonor abroad and a saturnalia of gambling and swindling at home. Now at last it has been exposed, and its bull dog grip on executives and legislators is shaken. Even the loyalty of corporation judges begins to waver and its own newspapers sound notes of warning. But plutocracy's impending overthrow will prove delusive and transitory unless the forces that supplant it are infused with the spirit of democracy, and there is danger that its reign may be followed by a regime as hostile to the progress we believe in as the most ardent money worshipper of them all.

There is peril in the autocratic executive for instance, whose weakness is exemplified so strikingly by President Roosevelt, grandiose in utterance, puny in achievement. It is folly to lend ear to the "strong man"

theory of government, to look for a prodigious leader who will override legislatures, courts and constitutions and single-handed achieve the impossible. Failure in this direction is certain. Success would mean not democracy, but a dictatorship.

There is the spirit of aristocracy, so apt to clothe itself in pharisaic garb. Not long ago an eminent representative of smug and prosperous respectability, who was elected "reform" Mayor of New York with the aid of many Single Taxers, they seeming to think him almost a convert, made, according to a newspaper usually accurate, this confession of faith:

"One of the chief needs of this country is a greater number of men who do not have to work for a living. England has a large number of this class, and I suppose we have not because we have not had many men of great wealth until recent years. This class of people can give their time and ability to working for their community."

That is, let a small proportion of the community be supported in luxury by their fellows, and let those so supported devote some of their time to running things for the working majority, and all will be lovely. Benevolence from the supported idlers, gratitude from the supporting toilers. Tableau. Clearly democracy has no business in that gallery.

Sumptuary and paternal legislation provide another pitfall into which multitudes stumble. Instead of dealing with natural rights they would try by law to reform individual character. They care little for causes and look only at results. But, whether their aim be to prohibit the sale of liquor regardless of the rights of those who use it, or to limit the amount of wealth an individual may acquire without question as to honesty or dishonesty in the acquirement, or something else equally unattainable and undemocratic, their counsels serve but to distract and divide.

Most dangerous of all is the spirit of demagogism—dangerous because a demagogue is a counterfeit democrat and, like counterfeits of other things, is often a good imitation. Fortunately, there are signs by which the two can readily be distinguished. A demagogue is always primarily a self-seeker. He flatters where a democrat would warn. He concerns himself not with truth, but with popularity, not with logic, but with novelty. A man may proclaim his democracy through a dozen personally owned newspapers and thereby gain an enormous popular following, and he need not be suspected because of his wealth or because his papers are not patterns of good taste or journalistic dignity. But if we find in their news columns an amazing indifference to accurate statement, and in their editorial policy a championship of great armaments and a semi-indorsement of national aggression and conquest, we may hesitate to accept his leadership, no matter how truculent his attacks on corporate

wealth. For militarism and imperialism are surely of all things democracy's most deadly foes.

All this is, of course, to find fault with no man for voting as to him seems best. Unfortunately, the choice is usually Hobson's, and it may be that something can be accomplished by the support of men who go ever so short a way with us. But not from such men can great things be looked for. We must have democrats. What, for example, might not be accomplished by a Congress under the impetus that would be given it by even a score of members animated by the spirit of Johnson and Bryan, of Baker and La Follette?

FRANK C. WELLS.

THE MAN AT THE MARGIN.

The idea of the *margin* is the most fundamental of all economic ideas. The economic margin and the man who works thereon furnish the basis of all true economic discussion. All Single Taxers are familiar with the doctrine of the "margin of cultivation" and its relation to the problem of ground rent; but this is only one of many manifestations of the idea of the margin as it appears in a complete analysis of economic phenomena. And not only is the man at the margin the most important person in the entire realm of economics in any complete theoretical discussion of economic problems, but he also occupies a vital position in the field of politics when we consider the matter of putting Single Tax doctrines into practical operation.

In the open market at any given time there is a group of men supplied with some commodity which they, in competition with one another, offer for sale to the general public. Somewhere among the buying public there is a man who must be reached by these sellers and induced to buy in order that they may dispose of their entire stock of the commodity in question. Such a man becomes the marginal buyer of that commodity in that market and the sellers must cater to him. In some way, by appeals to his needs, or desires, or even whims, and by lowness of price to come within his means, he must be reached as a buyer. In the open market, modern competition among sellers resolves itself into a matter of expertness in reaching the marginal buyer—the most indifferent buyer whose purchase is necessary to exhaust the supply.

Just so in the field of practical politics those who desire the public to adopt a new doctrine, such as the Single Tax, must make their appeal not only to those who will most readily accept the doctrine but also to those who are most indifferent to it, but whose votes are necessary to its adoption. The moment this fact is fully recognized, that moment it will appear that if the Single Tax is ever to be adopted, appeals in its

favor must be made to all classes of people.

Another thing: Our appeals to various people must be made in the most effective way. And this way is, whenever possible, to build upon the foundations already laid in men's minds rather than to tear down these foundations and begin anew. If a man is inclined towards socialism, it is better, in my judgment, to show him that the Single Tax working plan contains all the really good features of socialism, than to undertake to combat his socialistic ideas with individualism. If a man is a firm believer in protection, it is easier to show him that the protective idea can be maintained better without a tariff than with it, than it is to try to convince him that he is weak-minded for believing in protection at all.

This is not political trimming—it is the exercise of practical common sense. Single Taxers must become expert in reaching not only the favorably inclined, but also the indifferent and even hostile marginal voter. We must attract to our movement the socialistically inclined and the protectionists. The individualists and the free traders to whom we usually appeal would not suffice, if we had them all. The marginal voter lies beyond the reach of our present propaganda.

OLIVER R. TROWBRIDGE.

OUR WORK.

Ever since my conversion to the Single Tax, it has seemed to me that the especial work of Single Taxers was to get the people to accept our doctrines. Others have advocated and practiced, various forms of political action, but except as a means of propaganda, it has never seemed to me wise.

Political parties grow, they are not *made*. When the time is ripe for them, they spring into being and do their work.

The people, generally, do not, yet understand the reform we advocate, the need for it, or the effect it would have. These are the things we should make them see and feel and understand.

The power of the people when once aroused, is well illustrated by the recent overturning in Philadelphia. One short year ago the City was in the grasp of as unscrupulous a gang of thieves as ever looted a public treasury. Anyone, at that time, prophesying its overthrow would have been laughed to scorn. And yet, in a few months, almost weeks, without an election, simply by a popular uprising, caused by the exposure of a particularly audacious scheme to rob the people further, its power was broken, its scheme defeated, and the way opened for its complete overthrow at the next election. The people's cause probably, never looked darker than just before the crash came.

Before the civil war and the John Brown raid, the country seemed hopelessly in the grasp of the slave-power; church, college