

LESSON X CONCLUSION.

The Single Tax vs Socialism and other proposed forms of government

Let us consider the question sometimes asked: "Is not the Single Tax only a step toward Socialism?" Often, too, one hears Socialists themselves say: "The Single Tax is all right as far as it goes, we believe in it, but it does not go far enough." Even though Georgists and Socialists do agree that the destruction of private property in land is a vital necessity, yet in spite of this, they stand on principles essentially antagonistic, and are headed in entirely opposite directions. For while the Socialists would destroy private property in land, merely as a first step in the direction of destroying other property rights, the Georgist would destroy private property in land solely because in no other way can property rights in labor products be secured. The goal of the Single Taxer is equality of opportunity and the liberty of the individual, the goal of the Socialist is equality of product, and the control of the individual and his activities by the state.

There are really two governmental philosophies in the world. According to one, society, as such, is primary consideration, the individual is secondary, - to be considered only from the view point of his value to society. These are well named socialists, or socialists. According to the other philosophy, the welfare of the individual is the supreme consideration, society being only incidental and secondary. These are the individualists.

Marx and others of the first school, contend, or assume, that certain natural laws are blunders which must be corrected by man. In the economic field, they believe that the judgment and wisdom of a body of men (usually a small minority) can be trusted to change or to nullify natural laws; they hold that the way to progress lies in the control of the individual by the state, and that the abolition of the freedom of the individual is not too great a price to pay for "the greatest good to the greatest number"; they hold that Capital must be accumulated before men can go to work; that no man can make a profit without other men sustaining a loss and that economic justice lies in the equalization of men and their products. They contend that the interests of Capitalists are opposed to those of laborers, and that the whole industrial system must be a struggle between classes as to which shall rule.

To Georgists and others, who believe in the supremacy of the individual, the greatest goal for everyone seems a far better goal than the greatest good for the greatest number. They agree with Herbert Spencer when he says that every man should have opportunity to do as he will so long as he does not infringe upon the equal opportunity of another. They believe that no man or group of men can regulate the whole body of citizens into happiness or prosperity; they believe that natural laws in economics are just as immutable as is the law of gravitation, and will continue to operate in spite of all of man's effort to nullify them. They realize that Labor produces all wealth, including that which is used as Capital, and that the interests of Capital and Labor are identical; They recognize that profits are composed of rent, wages or interest, or any two or all three of these. They contend that no economic justice can be attained or maintained save through equality of opportunity to all to make a living, including the opportunity of each to retain for himself his own property, whatever he may produce, whether that amount be great or small.

by labor, the labor of individuals and groups of individuals. The only way the people can get these things is by taking them away from the people who have produced them. Seldom is it proposed that these things be bought by the state. The usual proposal is that they must be yielded up to the state, either voluntarily or involuntarily. Even if they were purchased, they could be purchased only with money collected from other individuals. For the state to compel any individual to give up even one cent's worth of what he has produced, without his consent, is to do violence to the whole principle of recognition of property rights. If any citizen can be compelled to give up any of his property to the state, there is no logical stopping place in the taking of property until the state has it all.

For the state to take ownership of land, is for it to take only what belongs to it, but for the state to take ownership of anything more, is for it to take what does not and cannot belong to it.

Georgists contend that when all ground rent is collected by society and used to pay the expenses of government, and nothing else whatever is taken from the individual by the state, then every man will have for himself all that rightfully belongs to him, and will be economically free.

It is sometimes contended that because a man can produce more working with others than he could produce if he works alone, therefore a part of what he produces belongs to society. This claim will not stand analysis. What is it that measures how much each individual owes to society. This is not fixed by the caprice of some individual but by a natural law. As already demonstrated, the rental value of any piece of land measures the market value of the advantages which men may get from working on that particular site. These advantages are given to that site by nature and by society. Therefore, when a man pays the full rental value of the land he uses to the government, he is paying society in full for the advantages which he receives from living at that location. When a man has paid for the economic advantages which he receives from society, then he has paid his bill in full, and he owes nothing more, of an economic nature, to society. The remainder of his product constitutes his wages, and belongs, absolutely, to him alone.

Coercion in individual affairs by the government, through an edict or law, is just as truly invasion, as though it were perpetrated by an individual or by a lawless mob. If a man lives under a system of government, where he knows he will be compelled to give up all, or even a part, of what he produces to someone else, or even to the government itself, regardless of whether he works industrially or lazily, thoughtfully or carelessly, the incentive is removed from him to do his best or to improve his work. When a man realizes that the more he produces, the more will be taken from him, unless he were superhuman he would slump in his work. But when, as under the George plan, every man will know that he, himself, will receive the benefit of all his effort produces, and knows that he is free to do with his property what he likes, so long as he does not use it to infringe upon others, then the stimulus to better effort and to progress will be free to operate and to produce its natural beneficent results. A man may voluntarily give away his belongings, and take joy in the giving, but to be compelled to give away even a small portion of them, arouses his resentment and antagonism, - and quite properly so.

The definition quoted from the Aristotelia states that the world would require "the strictest public regulations and discipline." To regulate industry must also require the regulation of the men and women, working in that industry, and so on. The bureaucracy will be needed to pry into the affairs of every individual if there were any violations of the regulations.

The George plan, on the other hand, would leave government concerned itself only with those things which relate to the community as a whole, - the preservation of peace, the regulation of land taxation, and the collecting and spending of the community's income. Beyond this the government would leave the individual strictly alone to look out his own salvation.

The greatest human struggle throughout history has always been the struggle for individual liberty. Human beings will submit to injustices if they must, or if they cannot see how it is avoidable, but mankind will never be content with anything but freedom, and the struggle will go on until this is attained. Because of this no form of government can be permanent excepting that one which will give to the individual the greatest possible degree of liberty, and therefore, any government, if it would be permanent, must put an end to private property in land.

One dare not prophesy when this truth will see fruition. It may not be for centuries, or, some upheaval in society may bring it suddenly to the fore. But, as the Stoics used to say: "That is the business of Jupiter, not ours". Ours is to do the work as we may, ours to plant the seed which will, must, ultimately give results. But of this we can be sure: the time will come when this great truth will be acknowledged, - that no human child comes into the world without bringing with him a just and equal claim with all of his fellows to the use of the earth.

"It may be a long, long struggle, but to see the truth and do what one can to spread it, brings its own rich and independent reward."

Why are our present systems of government on the verge of failure? Democracy, which, theoretically should allow the greatest freedom of individual activity?

That the democratic form of government would work under the most adverse conditions, high wages, and little difference between the conditions of the richest and the poorest, there was no doubt, - almost any form of government would survive under these conditions. The doubt is whether our democratic form of government will continue when land prices have become prohibitive, wages low, and a great gulf separates the richest from the poorest. Of course, under these conditions a true democracy is impossible. The form of a democratic government may be kept but its spirit is gone.

In 1857 Macaulay wrote a letter in which he stated his belief that democracy itself was at fault, and prophesied that our democracy would fail. His vision was keen, and he drew quite an accurate picture of the road we would take and of the position in which we now find ourselves. But in spite of Macaulay, it is not Democracy itself which is at fault. Unhealthy social conditions are only the result of interference with natural economic laws. There is no natural order which compels one man to live in want, while another lives in wasteful luxury. In this world it is possible to produce enough for all, and to spare. But if one man is permitted to ignore the rights of others by taking more than his rightful share, others must get less than their share.

If one man can legally forbid another to go to work, or can compel him to pay for the chance to go to work, then the seed is sown which leads directly to our present condition, and to much worse, if the cause for this condition is not removed. Even Macaulay recognized vaguely that our safety lay in keeping the land free, for he prophesies that "so long as we have a boundless extent of fertile, unoccupied land" we will have no trouble.

Macaulay says that our Constitution is "all sail and no anchor". Our Constitution is one of the most wonderful state papers ever written, but it does have one serious omission, and that omission has helped to put us where we are now. The Constitution set up safeguards for property, but it did not define property, it allowed both men and land to be claimed as private property. We fought the Civil War in order to establish the fact that, in this country, men could not legally be held as property. What it may cost us to free the land, we do not know, but until it is free, mankind cannot be free, and a true democracy is impossible. Today even the form of Democracy is in danger.

How much value will be placed upon political liberty by a man who is economically a slave? Five Dollars for a vote will be just that much velvet, and a job with the government will be welcomed with open arms even though the man knows that its acceptance means that his conscience, his freedom of speech and activity are bought with the politician's money along with his time and energy.

The problem of the thief is to find someone who has something and then to try to take it away from him. It seems almost as though government today, had no better plan than this, when it considers the question of taxation.

In 1857 Lord Macaulay wrote, in the famous letter to W.L. Garrison, the biographer of Jefferson - "the latter which President Garfield said startled him "like an alarm bell at night," - as follows:

"I have long been convinced that institutions purely democratic must sooner or later destroy liberty or civilization, or both. You may think that your country enjoys an exemption from these evils. I will frankly own to you that I am of a very different opinion. Your fate I believe to be settled, though it is deferred by a physical cause. As long as you have a boundless extent of fertile and unoccupied land, your laboring population will be far more at ease than is the laboring population of the old world, and while that is the case the Jefferson politics may continue to exist without any fatal calamity. But the time will come when wages will be as low and will fluctuate as much with you as with us. You will have your Manchesters and your Birminghams, and in these Manchesters and Birminghams hundreds of thousands of artisans will assuredly be out of work. Then your institutions will be brought to the test. Distress everywhere makes the laborer mutinous and discontented, and incline him to listen to agitators who tell him that it is a monstrous iniquity that one man should have a million while another cannot get a full meal. ***

"I have seen England pass through three or four such critical seasons as I have described; through such seasons the United States will have to pass in the course of the next century, if not of this. How will you pass through them? I heartily wish you a good deliverance. But my reason and my wishes are at war, and I cannot help foreboding the worst.

"The day will come when in the State of New York, a multitude of people, none of whom has had more than half a breakfast or expects to have more than half a dinner, will choose a legislature. On one side is a statesman teaching patience, respect for vested rights, strict observance of public faith. On the other is a demagogue, ranting at the tyranny of capitalists and usurists, and asking why anybody should be permitted to drink champagne and ride in a carriage while thousands of honest people are in want of necessities. Which of these candidates is likely to be preferred by a working-man who hears his children cry for bread?

"I seriously apprehend that you will, in some such season of adversity as I have described, do thing which will prevent prosperity from returning. There will be, I fear, spoliation. The spoliation will increase the distress. The distress will produce fresh spoliation. There is nothing to stop you. Your constitution is all sail and no anchor.

"As I said before, when society has entered on this downward progress, either civilization or liberty must perish. Either some Caesar or Napoleon will seize the reins of government with a strong hand, and your republic will be as fearfully plundered and laid waste by the barbarians in the twentieth century as the Roman empire was in the fifth, with the difference that the Huns and Vandals who ravaged the Roman empire came from without; and that your Huns and Vandals will have been engendered within your own country by your own institutions."