

LAND VALUE TAXATION AS A POLITICAL ISSUE IN THE ARGENTINE.

A correspondent in Buenos Aires writes: The elections held on Sunday, March 30th, in Buenos Aires, for the National Senate and Congress have resulted in an overwhelming majority for the so-called Socialist party, whose electoral platform included, as first and most important plank, the abolition of all taxes upon the necessities of life and upon industry and commerce, and their substitution by a progressive tax on land values. The Socialist vote almost equalled the combined vote of the other two parties, being 48,000 as against 30,000 and 22,000 of the Union Civica (Conservatives) and the Radicals respectively.

The case for the relief of industry and the taxation of the communal value of land has been stated persistently, clearly, and consistently by the Socialist orators on hundreds of platforms and in their election literature, and their victory has been complete.

The leaders of the Socialist party are intellectuals, who have freed themselves from the old Socialist antipathy towards Capital as the eternal and inevitable antagonist of Labour. They are clear that their first duty is to relieve both Capital and Labour from the trammels of land monopoly; and they are confident that the problem of the relations between Capital and Labour will then be solved by a progressive and frictionless development of Collectivism.

Simultaneously with the overwhelming victory of the democratic programme of the Socialist party at the polls, the President of the Republic, Dr. Roque Saenz Peña, has nominated as Finance Minister Dr. Norberto Piñero, who, as Finance Minister in 1906, introduced and carried into law a drastic Bill for the separate valuation and assessment of land values in the federal capital and the national territories. The valuation was actually carried out; but a reactionary Government following suspended the application of the assessment.

It has been the consistent policy of the present Argentine President since his election in 1910 to break up the land monopoly which has so retarded the development of the Argentine. His first attempts, through successive Budgets brought forward by his Finance Ministers, Dr. Rosa and Sr. Perez, failed through the resistance of a congress largely representing the landed interests. Dr. Saenz Peña finally secured, by persuasive means which remain a mystery, the passage of the new Electoral Reform Bill, which made the ballot secret and compulsory on all electors. The first application of the new law, in the elections of last year, was a sweeping victory at the polls for the Radical party, who represented the aspirations of the people for popular government. The victory of the democratic programme of the Socialist party at the election of March 30th still further strengthens the hands of the President. It is, therefore, quite probable that the taxation reform, destined to relieve industry and break up land monopoly, will now have a fair chance of being carried into execution. The Socialist leaders have already expressed publicly their satisfaction at the nomination of Dr. Norberto Piñero, and recall with approval his land valuation and assessment measure of 1906.

Unfortunately the recent election was only for three deputies and one senator in the federal capital, and the election of last year was only for one half of the members of both Chambers. A large number of Senators and Deputies therefore still represent the old regime of electoral fraud and oppression. It is likely, however, that the unmistakable demand of the people, as evidenced by the election of March 30th, will have a salutary effect upon all Senators and Deputies, and make less difficult the truly patriotic and far-seeing policy inaugurated by Dr. Saenz Peña. He has no easy task before him, not only in the matter of land and taxation reform, but also in the financial situation of the nation, which is bad.

We are enabled to publish from a well-informed private source the following personal notes, which will explain the remarkable fact that the Argentine Socialist party is harmonious and knows what it wants and how to get it.

I am mailing you a copy of LA VANGUARDIA (March 22nd, 1913), the Socialist newspaper of Buenos Aires, and of an election circular of the Socialist party; elections are on March 30th. In both you will notice that the first plank is Taxation of Land Values, linked with the abolition of taxes on food and necessities. The other planks are Freedom of Meeting and Association, Universal Suffrage in Municipal Elections, Reforms of Conscription and Court Martial Laws, Disestablishment, a Divorce Law, and Abolition of Capital Punishment. None are distinctively Socialistic, but rather are of the advanced Radical order; as Dr. J. B. Justo, the party leader, says, they do not follow Marx or Hyndman, but rather Lloyd George!

The leaders of the Argentine Socialists are a group of intellectuals. Dr. Justo, himself a lawyer, is a man of the study, author of a thoughtful book on the THEORY AND PRACTICE OF HISTORY, a man of means and devoted to the task of securing political, religious, and economic freedom. Dr. del Valle Iberlucea is a young Professor of History in both the La Plata and Buenos Aires University, organiser and director of the University Extension movement in Argentina; he is a lawyer also and editor of a magazine, HUMANIDAD NUEVA (which publishes, e.g., Henry George's speeches). Dr. Alfredo Palacios, lawyer, and professor in the faculty of law in Buenos Aires University, is a man of irrepressible energy and rare eloquence. The party is strong in the possession of other men of talent and untiring zeal. The candidates and leaders are all University men, and, therefore, prepared to understand and insist upon economic law in the settlement of industrial and commercial disorder. I feel sure, therefore, that the placing of land value taxation in the forefront of their electoral programme is not a mere vote-catching device, but the result of a conviction that it is a fundamental condition of economic freedom. M. J. S.

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