

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT.

OUR DWINDLING PUBLIC LANDS.

It is sometimes disputed by people who do not trouble to ascertain the real facts, that the area of our public lands fit for settlement is fast disappearing. That a policy of reckless squandering of the national territory could be continued indefinitely was one of the foolish delusions indulged in by the thoughtless. But recent investigations into the criminal land operations of those high in the favor of the government have caused a rude awakening.

It is, of course, clear to the Single Taxer that the public lands of the nation—deemed inexhaustible—have long been a potent factor in maintaining the high rate of wages prevailing in this country as compared with wages in the older countries of Europe. But the time when this factor will be no longer operative is clearly in sight.

The entire policy in dealing with our public lands has been in accordance with the ethics of border ruffianism. The opening of the Cherokee strip, the last great fertile tract that remained, was a foot-race for the boomers, and when the race was over the honest, peacable, law-abiding settler, who arrived a little late, found the land taken up by speculators, and the price for securing a spot for settlement a heavy handicap in the months and years to come. It is matter for congratulation that President Roosevelt has indicated a better way of dealing with the public lands that remain, which leads us to believe that there may have been some vague apprehension of true economic principles in the mind of the president when he assured Congressman Baker that he was more of a Single Taxer than we imagine.

The number of acres of land now owned by the nation is 536,000,000, much of which is mountain, desert or swamp. It is quite impossible to fix the proportion that is or can be made adaptable for settlement. It does not seem extravagant to fix the amount so adapted or adaptable at less than half the number of acres given. The maximum number of sales in recent years was reached in 1908, when 23,000,000 acres passed into private hands. The sales for the current year may reach as high a figure, and at this rate the disappearance of the last acre of our public domain is within a measurable distance of time.

To men who do not accept the doctrine that the land of the whole country is the common property of the people of that country, and that this property right may be secured by a simple change in the tax laws, this ought to be a matter for very grave concern. To Single Taxers with a faith in the ultimate awakening to a real perception of man's relation to the earth he

inhabits, it does not greatly matter; indeed, the final disappearance of the last acre of public land, from the small patch in the fertile valley to the last and most desperate spot for a clinging foothold at the top of Pike's Peak, will remind the silly chatterer of the loss of what seemed to him his most conclusive retort to the Single Taxer: "If you want land, why don't you go west and take up public land?"

J. D. M.

WAGES AND INTEREST: THEIR RELATION TO THE TOTAL WEALTH PRODUCTION.

In any civilized and progressive country wealth will always increase at a greater ratio than population. In this nation the population in 1850 was 23,000,000, and the wealth was \$7,000,000,000, which was equal to \$308 per capita. In fifty years (1900) the population had increased to over 76,000,000; but the wealth had increased to \$94,300,000,000, which is given as \$1,285.86 per capita.

What becomes of the enormous amount of wealth produced every year? To whom does it go? There are but two agents engaged in producing wealth, labor and capital. Do labor and capital divide between them all the wealth they produce? They would do so ultimately, and the entire amount of wealth produced would go to them in just proportion, if there were no artificial restrictions, and no statute laws interfering with the just and natural division of wealth. But the most reliable figures that can be obtained lead to the conclusion that the total national income is divided in about three equal portions, one-third going to labor, one-third to capital and one-third to privilege. The one-third which goes to privilege can only do so at the expense of labor and capital. To this extent, therefore, labor and capital are deprived of their full earnings for the enrichment of privileged classes. This unfair division of the total annual wealth production obtains in almost all civilized countries and is the result of laws and institutions dating back to the earliest times. These laws and institutions, however, are none the less unjust and injurious, and must some time in the future come up for examination and judgment at the bar of public opinion.

The official figures just quoted show that while each individual on the average in 1850 was owner of \$308 of wealth, in 1900 the individual wealth was no less than \$1,285.86. This amount of wealth per capita is annually increasing. If the total wealth of the nation were equally divided, which is neither possible nor desirable, each American family would possess upwards of \$5,000. Our political orators, and sometimes even our editors, actually assume that this is so. They loudly glorify the enormous increase

in the wealth of the nation, assuming all the while that this increase goes to the people; whereas the proportion that goes to those who make it all, is very much less than that which goes to those who produce none of it.

The privileged classes that absorb so much of the wealth produced by capital and labor attract popular attention chiefly when they assume the form of trusts and monopolies. But trusts and large corporations are not necessarily evil, and may be beneficial to the general public. They are always beneficial as far as they tend to economize labor and produce by better and cheaper methods the things that the people consume. The evil they do is the result of the unjust legal privilege which underlies so many of them. And the legal privilege which gives them their power for evil consists mostly of monopoly of land or some natural opportunity. The coal trust, the steel trust, the lumber trust and other combinations that work evil do so because they have the power to shut off others from the treasure-house of nature which belongs alike to all. In the last analysis these privileges constitute a monopoly of land. The franchisees which are often so valuable are only another form of ground rent. And ground rent is the instrument which deprives capital and labor of their just share of the wealth they produce without returning any equivalent. Ground rent is the key to the problem of wealth distribution.

The institution of ground rent is not a human institution; it was natural as the law of gravitation and as inevitable. Like a large sponge ground rent absorbs one-third of all the wealth annually produced; and this process cannot be prevented. The wrong of it lies in the fact that law and ancient custom permit the recipients of ground rent to retain it for their individual use instead of paying it into the public treasury for public expenses.

The amount of increase in land values every year would be incredible if it were not made evident beyond contradiction by plain figures in public documents. In the city of Boston land values have long been increasing at a rate exceeding 4 per cent. per annum. This increasing wealth is made not by those who enjoy it but by those who trade and do business and live in Boston. The landlord, as landlord, creates not a cent of it. It is all created by the community, and the custom is to make a present of this wealth to the privileged owners of land. The fifteen or sixteen millions of dollars added annually to their wealth does not depend on the will of the owners at all. It does not cost them a moment's care or effort, or a cent of outlay. It is a pure gift from the city at the expense of capital and labor. And the same thing goes on in every city and town in the country. And year by year a larger and larger amount of

wealth goes to increase land values. When the question is asked, What becomes of the tremendous amount of wealth produced every year by American capital and labor? the answer must present as its principal item the diversion of one-third of it to increase ground rents which have not been earned by the beneficiaries.

The astonishing march of improvement and invention which has characterized the past century has neither increased interest nor wages, but it has enormously increased ground rents; and it is only at the expense of ground rents that labor and capital can secure a juster share in the wealth they jointly create. Even while the wages of labor have increased nominally they have declined as a proportion of the increased wealth. Interest has declined with wages as it always must. It requires more capital to-day to earn a dollar than it ever did. Capital and labor are worse paid than they were years ago; and their share is steadily decreasing. On the other hand the tendency of ground rent to increase is constant and universal and inevitable. Bringing the incidence of taxation to bear on land values and relieving capital and labor by decreasing other taxes is the only method by which they can obtain their just share in the wealth they jointly produce.

SAMUEL BRAZIER.

THE GOLDEN MEAN.

While Single Taxers class themselves as individualists and are prone to denounce socialism without reserve, a moment's consideration will show that government is impossible without some form and degree of socialism. Every government must have a revenue, and all money collected and spent for the common good is socialized. Every act of government which results in common benefits is socialistic; in fact it is impossible for any government of and for and by the people to perform a single overt act of individualism. Individualism is a term which applies only to things which popular government does not do; it involves those rights and doings which are reserved to the people in their individual capacities and activities.

When property, property values and business enterprises are owned and conducted by private persons, the governmental polity which permits and encourages such conditions of private ownership and business activity is individualism. In such cases the only positive function of government in respect to property and business is to protect and encourage them. But when property, property values and business enterprises are owned and administered by the State, for the common use and benefit of all the people, the governmental polity involved is that of socialism; not the socialism of the Socialist party, it is true, but