

A Plea For The Single Tax Party—What It Might Mean

MR. GEORGE WHITE, in his article on "Suggestions for Practical Work," which appeared in your Jan.-Feb. issue, says: "The party scheme has a more natural affiliation with the economic and fiscal than with the moral foundations of our proposal," and he adds that "there is an apparent absurdity in the tendency of men who claim to be 'middle-of-the-roaders,' excited and obsessed by the cruelly unjust conditions brought about by our land system, refusing, like William Lloyd Garrison, to compromise, minimize, extenuate or equivocate—and yet who are content to be active in such trifling enterprise as the formation of a party."

This is an old argument—another brief on behalf of the non-partyites in their ever pending case against the party actionists, but there is, inferentially, enough just criticism of the party in it to deserve the consideration of the partyite. Having the anxiety which is natural to Single Taxers as to how they are to achieve an earth free from land monopoly, I have for many years looked upon the party scheme as our best, biggest and only hope. To give up one's dearly cherished and only hope (for this is what it would mean to me to have Mr. White's counsel generally followed) is difficult; and yet, if nothing more is to be derived from the method he recommends and all effort is to produce nothing but apples of Sodom and Barmacidian feasts, what else is a practical and worldly man to do?

The question is gravely important.

But what is the situation? Are we indeed in such bad case as Mr. White's "Suggestions" would lead us to believe; and is he as practical as he seems?

If the party entity, as it has functioned since its organization, is to be taken as constituting the sum total of the party idea it is a mathematical certainty that Mr. White's position is unassailable and the party may as well be abandoned. This much may be admitted, but it is in his failure to note the difference between the party and the party scheme that Mr. White is in error. To him the two things are identical.

I am convinced that mere propaganda, though led by the flaming zeal of a Mohammed, without a political party, could get us nowhere.

The miserable little we have to show for fifty years of this kind of effort should teach us that there is a weakness in it; and, furthermore, that something besides moral verve is missing. Not to appreciate this is to relegate ourselves to the class that learns nothing and forgets nothing.

Even direct legislation (to which so many of us pinned our faith a few years ago) without a political party is not effective, as experience has amply shown. For example, the city of Toronto, Canada, in the last few years has three times adopted a Single Tax measure by direct legislation, but, owing to the lack of enabling laws, which none of the parties in power would introduce, it has remained unenforced, and, by all the signs, will likely remain that way till the crack of doom unless a party is formed to back it up.

But we can never see the imperious necessity for party action until we see the futility of the discussion between the fiscal and moral suasionists. There is no contradiction between the so-called "fiscal" and "moral" phases of our proposal, but a collaboration. Both phases are necessary to a full presentation. Those, like Mr. White, who are enmeshed in the coils of this discussion apparently forget that the first, last and only word of Privilege is power, and that this power, like our own, rests on an ideal—a wrong one, as we think—but, nevertheless, an ideal and that there is no place for our ideal until the other is destroyed.

The trouble with us is we have never gone forth to bloody battle against the thing that we are against, but have confined ourselves to a maudlin pathos over the sorrows of the exploited and disinherited which, as we know, the privileged ones, without ever a thought of relinquishing their unfair advantage, will hear sympathetically enough. We have failed either to realize that the mass, which is the source of all power and which must be won, has taken its ideal from the materialistic-minded beneficiaries of Privilege; or, we have failed to realize the true character of that ideal and the philosophy supporting it, emblazoned and heralded from all the pinnacles of thought and expression in the world as they are.

It is an undoubted fact that the ideal of the man in the mass is to become the possessor of wealth, and, in essence, the philosophy he is fed on is, that the material conditions of men are due exclusively to the difference in individuals, or, as Jim Lindsay of Cleveland delights to put it, to the ability of men to lift themselves above their fellows by their own boot-straps. This is the foundation of Privilege, the primal principle of the system, the sumpter beam of the structure. Have not the Henry Dubbs of the world dim visions of some day becoming Henry Fords? And Why? Is it not because Privilege jealously guards this ideal and this philosophy to the mass mind? How carefully it sees to it that none of the avenues of education—the press, the pulpit, the theatre, in short all forms of literature and art—conveys any idea inimical to its existence, should be patent to the most careless observer. So long, therefore, as all art, all literature and all philosophy pay court to the heroes of the clan and the market the mass will do likewise; and so long as this is true, playing the role of John Baptists, as Mr. White advises us to do, is chimerical and vain. The mass will not hear us; it will not heed us.

Surely, then, it would seem that our immediate task is a little less to teach the beauties of a free earth than to destroy the present mass vision.

Naturally, the question here arises as to how this is to be done? Before seeking the answer, however, we must consider carefully the nature of our mission. Being on our way isn't enough. We must know whither we are going. We all say, of course, that our mission is to abolish Privilege, but do we all know it? To accept a proposition without accepting its implications is nothing less than hypocrisy.

cially. It does not send many Single Taxers to prison because it can "get them" almost as effectually through banks, credit associations, courts, black-lists and newspaper associations.

I do not mean that we should persecute but that we must be determined on making the ideal of privilege hateful. If only half the ink we use in telling a heedless world the glad tidings about our far-off vision were used in pointing out the cheapness of the present going ideal it would destroy the ambition of the Henry Dubbs to become Henry Fords.

"Surely we must fight if we would reign," and all the talk in which we indulge and all the wierd and fantastic zeal we demand as the only quality necessary in this great war, are bunk and infantile babble. No, it is not love for our vision but the lack of it that causes us to avoid this issue. The genuine lovers of men are unrelenting haters of lies. Revolutions are not made of rose water.

The question for us of the party then is: Are we to continue in the same mild propaganda as those from whom we have broken, *i. e.*, are we to continue to meet the merciless onslaughts of Privilege with simple protest and wailing prayer; or, shall we fight?

GEORGE EDWARDS.