

Secretary Lane and His Land Policy

THE views of the national government on the fundamental issue of economics, the land question, are probably reflected in the two projects of Secretary Lane: the famous raid on the Indian reserves referred to in our last issue, and the new and more ambitious project of land settlement for the returned soldiers.

This latest proposal, and Secretary Lane's apparently carefully considered discussion of the project, cannot, certainly ought not to be a matter of indifference to that body of progressive opinion represented by the Single Taxers. The judgment of that opinion to the proposal and the arguments in its support as given by Secretary Lane in an interview published in the *New York Times* of September 15, is now invited. We shall be glad to print such condensed comments as may reach us in time for our next issue.

In the meantime we must express disappointment at the apparent absence in all that Mr. Lane says and proposes of any statesmanlike conception of the government's responsibility to the nation. He looks upon it, apparently, as simply one more administrative problem of the moment, and regards settlement on the land of a certain number of our soldiers on their return somewhat in the same light as he would regard the disposal of the immigration arriving any day at Ellis Island.

In referring to 150,000,000 acres of "cut over" land, which he has in view for his settlement scheme, he admits that "practically all this cut-over land is in private hands; and unless a policy of development is worked out between the federal government, the State and the individual owners, the greater part of it will remain undeveloped and uncultivated. . . . For the sake of the nation all these lands should be reclaimed, as far as possible, irrespective of the war."

Mr. Lane makes no suggestion that the owners of all these millions of unused acres have any obligation to the nation, no hint even that this ownership should be qualified by adequate use. He entertains such an idea of responsibility only when he comes to deal with the returned soldiers, whose patriotic services he might have acknowledged unconditionally.

"My programme," he says, "is that the men should reclaim their own land, build their own homes; that it should not be a matter of bounty or charity, but simply an opportunity."

Note now that the soldier is to reclaim this land; he is expected to improve the land which now lies unreclaimed and unused. No such condition is demanded of the present owners of these unused millions of acres. But to the soldier the condition of use with occupancy is to be insisted upon. He is to reclaim the wilderness and the arid desert land, though the present owners decline that responsibility and are upheld in their refusal by government. The soldier who has been fighting for his country in other lands is asked on his return to go to work for all he gets, while those who hold the land he fought for are to get all without

working or fighting. Even the ancient Romans had a surer sense of justice than this.

Our soldiers are to be insulted by conditions in their land titles which are wholly ignored in the case of those who already own without using hundreds of millions of acres! And this from a reputed Single Taxer! Think of it. What is to be tolerated, for some unexplained reason, in the case of the land speculator and the economic slacker, is not to be thought of in the case of the returned soldier.

We would ask Secretary Lane this plain question, and it is up to the Single Taxers of the country, especially those in office, if they are not afraid to speak out, to put it to him: Are you willing to ask Congress for immediate application of this principle of conditional ownership to all land and natural opportunities in this country? He might be surprised at the response to such a suggestion should he make it. Until he does so, he is placing the soldiers of our country in an inferior category, in a position which every friend of the soldier should resent.

Is Congress prepared to go on record as sanctioning so odious a discrimination? Is not public opinion weary of this eternal favoring of the land speculator's interest? The fiscal discrimination in favor of the non-use as against the adequate use of land, in view of what Canada, Australia, and now South America are doing, is even now a national scandal.

The proposal of Secretary Lane will be met with a chorus of approval from the land speculators. They are even now preparing for the harvest that awaits them on the return of our soldiers. Land investment for speculation has been made thoroughly safe by our fiscal legislation, and Secretary Lane's ambitious proposal serves to ratify the sense of security. Our soldiers are to be drafted for a new campaign, which is to create land values for absorption by economic parasites.

If Secretary Lane and the government really desire to make the experiment of land ownership conditioned upon adequate use, surely they can find a better way than this of Secretary Lane's.

There is another aspect of the question that Secretary Lane has evidently not considered, and that is that at least ninety per cent., if not more, of the returned soldiers, if sound in mind and limb, will be absorbed in ordinary occupations. This is the experience of Canada and will be ours.

Now what provision does the Secretary make for them? Evidently none. Does his foresight extend only to the ten per cent.?

Here in this first notable government project and official pronouncement on the land question to emanate from the federal government is the net result of our political policy for the last twenty years in support of the Democratic Party. In it is confirmed everything we have said of the unwisdom of this course.

We say again—had Single Taxers possessed the courage

of their convictions and not thrown such political strength as they possess unconditionally with the Democratic Party, we would have had leaders who would have led—perhaps another Henry George, if that were possible—peace to the soul of the prophet! Instead we have a Lane. O tempora, O mores!

Now we will let the Secretary speak for himself:

"At the end of the war we shall receive back from France several million men who will have gained a larger view of the world. Some will want to step back into their old positions and trades. Others will have a desire developed in them for a larger and more independent life. It is not good for the nation that we should have these men unoccupied on their return. They would demoralize the labor market and quickly become demoralized themselves.

"This is just what we should now prepare to avoid. The country needs to regard with consideration, very serious consideration, the competency of its people, their ability, as individuals, to do some one thing well. An educational system of some kind should be devised by which those who are competent to do so can be prepared to fill a larger place in the world than that which they left. Opportunity should be opened through trade schools and colleges and universities by which those who wish to become competent in trades or professions can have that opportunity, so that the farm boy from Kansas if he has a desire and aptitude to be a chemical engineer, can become one; so that the mill hand from Massachusetts can become an electrician; so that the boy from the east side of New York, if he sees the advantage of being the creator of wealth on a farm and working for himself, can have a farm.

"My plan is not sentimental; it isn't emotional. I think it is profoundly sound socially. We should all be concerned in placing as many of the returning men as possible on the land, from which comes all life."

"How much of the unused lands can be made available for new farms?" Secretary Lane was asked.

"Surveys and studies are necessary to determine that definitely," he answered; "but we know there are millions of acres of undeveloped lands which can be made available for our homecoming soldiers. In general there are three classes of these lands: arid lands in the West, cut-over lands—lands that have been logged and the stumps left standing—in the Northwest, lake States and the South, and swamplands in the Middle West and the South.

"Our public land in the West, outside of Alaska, consists of 230,000,000 acres, but these are not like those of the prairie country, to which civil war veterans returned. Money must be expended on them before they can be made into farms, and only a part of this land is so situated as to be put under irrigation. It has been officially estimated that more than 15,000,000 million acres of irrigable land remain in the government's hands, but large areas of the public lands in the West can provide other kinds of farms by what is known as dry farming and for grazing purposes.

"We have 150,000,000 acres of cut-over land. Practically all this cut-over land is in private hands, and unless a policy of development is worked out between the Federal Government, the States, and the individual owners, the greater part of it will remain undeveloped and uncultivated. Another 50,000,000 acres is swamp lands. As to what can be accomplished in this class of unused land we know that 15,000,000 acres of swamp land have already been reclaimed for profitable farming, most of it in the Mississippi River valley.

"For the sake of the nation all these lands should be reclaimed, as far as possible, irrespective of the war. We

are to have 200,000,000 people in this country in time, and we shall need all these lands. There can be no better time to start this work than now, when the problem of the returning soldier is almost upon us. I have asked Congress for an appropriation of \$1,000,000 for a survey of these unused lands, and on the basis of the survey I hope Congress will take up the program of their development, not all at once, but as rapidly as possible.

"My programme is that the men should reclaim their own land, build their own homes; that it should not be a matter of bounties or charity, but simply an opportunity—first, an opportunity to get work on their return and therewith the hope and confidence that springs from the knowledge that they will be working for themselves."

"How many could provision be made for under your program?" the Secretary was asked.

"Just as many as are willing to work," was the answer.

"A vast amount of construction would be opened up, both direct and indirect. Besides the immediate work of the making of homes on the land to be reclaimed, there would be the larger scale requirements, such as irrigation work and ditches, drainage, all road building—those needs that arise from the life of the community as a whole and its relation to the outside world. Then, in the indirect creation of work and opportunity, we should be developing a market for farm machinery, tractors, plows; materials of various kinds, stone, cement; for other kinds of machinery, as that required for hydro-electric plants. Further, we should be developing commodities for transportation, thus increasing employment and opportunity in this field—in fact, it would be like the army itself now, with as many men behind the programme of converting vast areas of unused or undeveloped land into productive farm homes as would be engaged in it. Further, another thing that should be the outgrowth of such a plan would be the foundation of more ideal rural communities in which the houses—the homes—would be gathered closer together, with a resultant more intimate social life. By the use of machinery in such communities the burden of the farmer's wife would be lessened and the farmer would have the advantage of using the expert knowledge of men who know markets and transportation methods—in a word, altogether a more real co-operation.

"There are two standpoints from which to look at this plan," said Secretary Lane, swinging back to the main proposition. "One that of making provision for the soldier who has been the safeguard of us all, the other from the standpoint of the land; a vast area of productive land will be added to our present total.

"Consider the programme from the standpoint of the soldier: It will strengthen his confidence while on the battlefield that his future has not been overlooked by us, that he is to have a job when he returns in any part of the country that he cares to live in, with the opportunity of making a home for himself. We will pay him wages, and out of his wages he can save enough to meet the first installment on the home he has helped to build. We should give him some training in modern agriculture and should certainly give him direction; that is, not turn him loose on a piece of wild land to get along as best he may. He should have forty years in which to pay back his debt, with interest; then to have the home for his own for himself and his children.

"Second, from the aspect of making a vast addition to the area of our farm lands: If the government does this thing, it will point a way to the development of all our unused lands. For example, one-half the tillable land this side of the Missouri River, so the Secretary of Agriculture says, is out of use. It is a problem of statesmanship to

find methods by which the land can be recovered for public benefit and by which men who live on farms can be made to realize the satisfactions of community life. Moving picture shows, newspapers, telephone and mail service are just as real demands for modern man and woman as clothes and shoes."

"When should this work be started?"

"Now," answered the Secretary, with emphasis; "it is an immediate duty. It will be too late after the war is over, and the prospect that the war will end next year adds to the urgency of the situation. There is much preparatory work to be done that requires time. By the time the war ends we should know not merely how much arid land can be irrigated, but how much swamp land can be reclaimed, how much cut-over land can be cleared, how much grazing land there is and how many cattle it will support, but also we should know with definiteness where it is practicable to build new irrigation plants, what the character of the land will be, the nature of the improvements needed and what the cost will be.

"About the other classes of land, swamp, cut-over and grazing, we should have the same definite information as to the amount of land practicable for reclamation, the cost, what crops they will raise. All this should be put on the basis of definite plans. That is what I mean by thinking ahead—applying the idea of the General Staff to working out in advance the solution of the greatest problem that will face us immediately after the close of the war."

Argentine

WE record the interesting fact that a new political party has been formed in the Argentine, under the name of Reform Party (Partido Reformista). A postal card from the headquarters of the party at Esmeralda 91, Buenos Aires, has just reached us. On one side it shows a photo-reproduction of a bust of Henry George, executed by an Italian sculptor, Mario Giovanetti. On the other side is a declaration of principles and of progress, which is a model of condensation. It reads:

"PRINCIPLES: The value of land, apart from improvements, is a social product and belongs rightfully to the community by which it has been produced, increased and sustained.

"PROGRAMME: To obtain the progressive and methodical change of our tax system, in the municipal, provincial and national spheres, until we have obtained the complete removal of taxes on commerce, industry, agriculture, cattle breeding, professions and other useful factors in the economic life of the people, including their food and other necessities; and the maintenance of the public administration by revenues derived exclusively from values attaching to land and other national sources of wealth, apart from improvements."

We understand that the Reform Party has presented a full list of candidates for the next municipal elections in Buenos Aires, upon the above principles and programme. We shall be interested in learning what support they receive from the electors.

"I HAVE the utmost faith in Henry George and his Single Tax."—V. ULLMAN, former president of the Norwegian Parliament.

Important Action by the Mayor of Buenos Aires

THE significance of the following project of law presented by the Municipality of Buenos Aires, a metropolis of about 1,750,000 inhabitants, the capital of the Argentine Republic, and certainly the largest city in the southern hemisphere, will not escape students of the economic evolution now in full swing. It is no isolated phenomenon. Buenos Aires only takes its place beside Sydney, as a city where industry can perform its civilizing labor without fiscal penalty.

But American Single Taxers cannot be content with contemplating the progress of sane taxation abroad. In no American city has the fiscal principle sanctioned by the mayor of Buenos Aires, been as yet officially recognized. And yet this is the country of the great apostle of economic liberty, the incomparable democracy.

Perhaps this item of news from South America may cause some heart-searching amongst our Single Tax leaders as to the soundness of the methods adopted in the United States for advancing fiscal reform. It is not possible to be satisfied with the sterile results of more than thirty years of propaganda.

Readers of the SINGLE TAX REVIEW will have noted the circumstance that fifteen commercial, industrial and professional associations of the city of Buenos Aires are affiliated officially with the Argentine Single Tax League. This one fact shows upon what a body of influential opinion the mayor of that city can rely when making his proposal to the National Government. Does any similar body of opinion stand behind the Single Tax in this country? If not, what is the reason? This is no academic question such as those we Single Taxers love to debate. Our methods of action are challenged by the progress made in South America. Are things to go on in the same old way?

THE MAYOR'S REPORT

After a year's serious examination of the city's sources of revenue, the mayor of Buenos Aires has addressed to the National Government a project of reform of the city's charter, which he asks the government to submit to Congress for approval. In his communication, the mayor says:

"After an impartial and careful study, this municipality has recognized the necessity of suppressing the numerous tax burdens that weigh upon the community, many of which are repeated upon the same business. Thus, for example, besides the general tax for lighting, street sweeping and cleaning, businesses pay another tax of the same character, a charge for analysis, a charge for inspection, an advertisement tax, and, when electric or other motors are used, yet another contribution. It is easy to understand the justice and legality of the taxpayer's protest against such a multiplication of imposts which fall for the most part upon the small merchant.

"In the subjoined project of law, the municipality proposes to suppress all the taxes and substitute for them an additional one which will fall upon all within the city,