

# THE LABOR ADVOCATE

(A WEEKLY)

LABOR ADVOCATE PUBLISHER

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TORONTO, CANADA, APRIL 3, 1891.

## NO MORE MUNICIPAL MONOPOLIES.

The application of the Toronto Telephone Company for a franchise enabling them to use the streets of the city in establishing a telephone system in opposition to that of the Bell Telephone Company ought to be rejected. A municipal monopoly is a monopoly.

It is asserted that the new company mean to supply the citizens with a telephone service at a cheaper rate than that now charged. Suppose they do; and cost to the business man who wishes to be in communication with as many telephone users as possible will be increased, as he will have to become a subscriber to both companies instead of one. The unnecessary cost of covering the same territory with two sets of wires will have, in the end, to be met by the public. His, of course, possible that at first the two rival companies will fight each other and cut rates—so to the great satisfaction of their customers. But, as has been repeatedly shown by experience, competition between monopolies is never of long duration. Either one will drive out the other and remain in possession, or they will conclude to unite their interests and an amalgamation under one shape or other will follow, when prices will be put up to a figure sufficient to cover all the losses of the competition period with interest.

Everybody with a grain of sense ought to know by this time that it is utterly folly to expect permanent cheapness or improvement in public services as a result of competition. All such enterprises as the telephone ought to be under city management. That is at present attainable, so far as the telephone system is concerned, but the next best thing in the interests of the people is rigidly to abstain from granting any more franchises, and while excluding all competition, hold the monopolists now in possession to the strict terms of their bargain.

## SPENCER ON SOCIALISM

The most noteworthy article in the current number of the *Free Press* is a monthly paper by Herbert Spencer entitled "From Freedom to Bondage." It was originally published as the introduction to "A Plea for Liberty," a recently issued English volume, written as a protest against the Socialist legislation. Anything the Mr. Spencer writes is of course worth reading, and it would be impossible for anyone to present the arguments against government control of industries more clearly and logically than he does. It is well that the declining cause of Individualism possesses so redoubtable a champion for when the admitted skill and reasoning power of one of the ablest of living scientists can make no better showing than Mr. Spencer has done in his recent anti-Socialist utterances, it is sufficient to demonstrate the weakness of his cause.

Mr. Spencer undertakes to show that in widening the sphere of government and entrusting many duties and enterprises to the state, which, in his opinion, ought to be left to private enterprise, society is nursing the germ of a new system of slavery. He holds that when the system of universal state management is brought about, as he clearly foresees that it will be, should the present tendencies continue, the officeholders will become a distinct caste, and reduce the workers to a state of serfdom more intolerable than their present condition. The reasoning by which he reaches this conclusion is very plausible but he ignores several considerations which strongly tell against it. In the first place he, like most Individualists, writes from the standpoint of the comfortable well-to-do classes. It may readily be granted that to the man who possesses an assured income, with plenty of opportunities for leisure and enjoyment, the prospect of an industrial commonwealth, where every man will be compelled to do some useful work in return for his living, offers from the selfish standpoint, no attractions. If the question of Socialism vs. Individualism is to be argued from the point of view of the comfortably situated few who alone really can be said to have any individual freedom, there is really nothing to discuss. But unfortunately to the great majority of mankind in civilized countries this much vaunted "individualism" is merely an empty name. They are hampered and fettered in every direction by the exigencies of competition, and are only parts of an immense industrial machine. It is absurd to imagine that those who have been already reduced to practical serfdom by monopoly will be in the least alarmed by the picture which Mr. Spencer draws of the slavery of Socialism. They will argue that while it may be better for them it cannot possibly be worse.

Mr. Spencer presents his case as though it were a choice between Socialism and genuine Individualism. This is disingenuous. Individualism in the true sense of the word is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. Modern industrial conditions are destroying it. The alternative lies not between the "bondage" of Socialism, and the freedom of Individualism, but between Socialism and the iron rule of monopoly. For government under existing conditions to refuse to govern is simply to substitute a form of concentrated capitalism, to let society and industry be ruled by railroad, money and factory kings. They, if permitted to exercise their power without state interference, are far more powerful than the nominal rulers—the government that does not govern. A handful of millionaires whose fat can throw hundreds of thousands of men out of employment, paralyze traffic, depress commerce, regulate prices and in all respect absolutely control the most vital interests of the public, are the government to all intents and purposes, and so long as they possess such powers the social ruler king, president or premier is merely a gilded slave.

It is strange that Herbert Spencer should be so much under the influence of traditional phrases that this very obvious view of the matter has escaped him. The people are called on to decide between asserting their rights to vote and throw this at present irresponsible power and regulate in any way the public interest, creating matters of profit and allowing capitalism to rule. As for all the high sounding talk about "individualism" and "free contracts" and "monopoly" that sort of talk may just as well be left out of the discussion. These things are a matter of fact and no longer exist for the masses of people and can have no place in the social economy of the future.

## TRIENNIAL ASSESSMENTS.

The more the proposal to substitute triennial for annual assessments is considered, the greater will be the injustice to the public of a measure conceived solely in the interest of speculators and land monopolists appear. There has been no popular demand for such legislation. If it had been subjected to discussion on its merits it would have forth general condemnation on the ground of its flagrant unfairness to other classes of property owners and tax payers. The clique of real estate gamblers specially interested in shifting their taxes upon the rest of the public did not dare to have the amendment fairly canvassed, so by wire-pulling and sinister influences they had the measure suddenly sprung upon the Council and rushed through before the press and the great body of citizens had any opportunity to pronounce upon it. It was a most discreditable dodge, and it is sufficient to suggest the iniquitous character of the proposal.

As everybody knows, land in this city has of late years increased very rapidly in value. Lately an attempt has been made to effect something like a proportionate increase in the assessments, with the result that the glaring discrepancies formerly observable between the real selling value of real estate and the figure marked on the assessment roll have been considerably lessened. The speculators and the numerous class who hold land as an investment without doing anything to add to its value in the expectation of profiting by the growth of the city, have for some time been very reticent under the levelling up process by which a portion of the unearned increment goes into the public treasury. Not desiring to oppose it openly, they have brought influence to bear upon the aldermen and induced the latter to father the scheme by which assessed land values will remain at a standstill for three years, no matter how great the actual increase may be during that term.

The provision to the effect that improvements made during the interval between assessments must be taxed just as usual, emphasizes the unjust nature of the measure. It puts a premium upon allowing land to be idle. The man who builds a house or a store must be assessed for the additional value imparted to the property by his own enterprise. His neighbor, who simply holds his land for a rise in value, and benefits by the improvement of adjoining property, pays no additional tax though his land may double or triple in value owing to the demand thereby created. The merchant who pushes his business and increases his stock, the manufacturer who develops his trade and gets in more machinery, the clerk or mechanic who by diligence earns increased pay, all have their taxes increased year by year. But the land owner, who does nothing but hold on and wait till the needs of a growing community forest up the value of his lots—the alone of all classes is to have the benefit of special legislation, shifting a large proportion of his taxes upon the shoulders of his industrious neighbors.

The proposed legislation is in contravention of all progressive and intelligent principles of taxation. Its only effect, should it be sanctioned by the legislature, will be to encourage an evil which, instead of being fostered, ought to be repressed. Land speculation is the curse of all growing communities, enriching a set of idlers, and discouraging industry by the imposition upon labor of a burden imposed by the land monopolist.

Yet will all these evils and abuses in plain sight, the Toronto City Council deliberate favor the speculators at the expense of the general public interest, creating matters of profit and allowing capitalism to rule from the city treasury to the pocket of the monopolists a sum estimated at \$300,000 per year representing the annual increase of taxation owing to the growth of land values.

We hope that the strong protests made against this particularly objectionable piece of legislation will secure its rejection by the Legislature. In any event those aldermen who lent their sanction should be strictly held to account by their constituents.

When the above was put in type we note that at a meeting of the Legislation Committee of the City Council on Tuesday, the objectionable clause was struck out of the bill embodying the legislation to be asked for by the city, two of the city members, Mayor Clarke and Mr. Tait declaring that they could not vote for it. This effectually disposes of the scheme for the present. But the aldermen who are responsible for its introduction will bear watching.

## GOODNESS AND GAIN.

It is quite possible for an individual or a society to possess a great deal of religion of the fashionable orthodox kind and yet have very little sense of justice or fair play. This is illustrated by an incident which recently occurred in connection with the Employing Printers' Association. Many of the members of that body fully realize that the wages now paid to compositors are inadequate, and are quite willing to consent to an increase, provided that it be general, as it would of course be unreasonable in these days of close competition to expect a few employers to give the increase on their own account, while their competitors continued to pay the lower rate. The question came up before the Employing Printers' Association, and a large number expressed themselves favorably to the increase, but it was strongly opposed by Messrs. William Briggs, manager of the Mill Book and Publishing House and in consequence of his opposition fell through. The Publishing House is one of the official schemes of the Methodist Church and supported by the entire denomination. When such an institution arrays itself in a spirit of bitter hostility against the just claims of organized labor, it is a wonder that religion of such a type has lost its hold on the working classes.

## DON'T EXPECT TOO MUCH

The *Pittsburg Trades Journal* says: "The effective manner in which labor has forced its claims on the British Parliament is shown in the fact that a royal commission has been appointed to investigate everything connected with the present condition of the working classes in that country. Heretofore the English law-making body has been accustomed to treat labor measures just as they were treated on this side of the water, that was to lay them on the table to stay there. However, things on both sides of the Atlantic are changing somewhat."

There is altogether too much of this sort of premature exultation over what is going to be done for labor by the English politicians—especially in view of Lord Salisbury's unstatesmanlike conduct in telling an audience of capitalists that the only result of the commission would be to expose the delusions cherished by the working classes. The English machine politicians Tory or Labor they will not do anything to help by the fear of losing votes. The commission is merely a dodge to secure decay and give the Government an excuse for postponing all action until the report is presented. The only way in which working men can get any legislation worth having from capitalist parliaments is to make it abundantly clear to the politicians that the latter have no other way to hope from the labor vote, than from the influence of capitalism. Once enforce that lesson thoroughly and the politicians will be

the obsequious servants of the masses who they now are of the plutocracy. But it can't be done so long as a government are divided by party rivalry and religion, and all sorts of petty miserable side issues, which politicians—though they pretend to fight each other over such questions—do all differences and stand together in solid phalanx whenever their privileges are threatened.

We direct attention to a letter from Mr. Charles Durand, which appears elsewhere, from which we get the impression that that gentleman does not like the LABOR ADVOCATE. This is satisfactory, bearing in mind that the public are apt to judge a newspaper by the kind of enemies it makes. We are also glad to have Mr. Durand's assurance that he did not take up arms in 1837. It is somewhat of a relief to know this, as it is always saddening to anyone of finer feeling to see any man, in his better days did good service for humanity, lapsing into Toryism and sycophancy in his old age. Accepting Mr. Durand's statement, we unreservedly admit that it would have been a great mistake to have hanged him in '37 along with Lount and Matthews. Such a death would have been an undeserved honor and would have secured him an immortality in the grateful remembrance of all lovers of liberty to which he is in no way entitled.

We hope that those of our readers who have occasion to buy thread will bear in mind the boycott issued by the American Federation of Labor and the K. of L. against Clark's O. N. T. cotton—an article which ordinarily has gotten a large sale in this city. Clark's thread mills at Newark, N. J., have been the scene of a protracted strike owing to oppression exercised by the firm towards their employees, and on several occasions the strikers have been brutally and without provocation clubbed by the police, and arrests made under color of law, but in flagrant violation of every principle of justice. The employees, most of them women, are making a brave fight, and are sustained by every Labor Reformer, and the most effective way to help them just now is by carrying out the boycott.

The present City Council is making a bad record for itself. The feeling that the majority of its members are the servilest tools of the wealthy classes, aroused by the ready assent given to the iniquitous triennial assessment scheme, will be strengthened by the throwing out of the business tax by a very large majority at the meeting on Tuesday afternoon. The present system is most unjust to the wage earners and small property owners who are assessed for every cent, while the wealthier class are let off much more easily. The business tax is by no means a perfect system, but it would be a great improvement on existing methods. Evidently, however, the friends of progressive measures have little to hope for from this Council.

The principles of Nationalism are making more rapid progress in England than on this continent. Postmaster General Raikes has forbidden the establishment of a corps of messenger boys in London, on the ground that the delivery of short-distance letters is a function rightfully belonging to Government, which private individuals have no right to undertake. He also stated in this connection that he is maturing a scheme for a messenger call and telephone service on a much greater scale than that contemplated. It is evident that public opinion in England is not in accord with Herbert Spencer's reactionary individualist notions, as the tendency to extend the scope of government action is stronger than ever.

The English people are much more advanced on the question of women's enfranchisement than we are on this continent. A bill is now before the Imperial Parliament making women