

The Single Tax

In a recent number that admirable paper, the "Outlook", published an article on "The Single Tax" which is of great interest to Canadians.

After a brief description of the inception of the idea, the writer discusses the progress made since Henry George's book "Progress and Poverty" first advocated it 34 years ago.

In New York and New Jersey "there is a definite movement in favor of increasing the taxes on land and decreasing them on improvements." But it is an admission that is confirmed later that "it has surprised us to learn what the progress of the Single Tax has been in various parts of the world in the last four years."

The article then gives this progress in different parts of the world.

In Great Britain, Lloyd George's Act of 1909 is given, and though the change is qualified as "a short step", we hardly agree with this. For a nation which has been admittedly largely under the control of the land-owning class to adopt an increment value duty is, we believe, a very tremendous step.

In Germany, the success of an increment tax on the Colony of Kiaochan led to its adoption by Frankfort and Cologne and others, until in 1910 the increment tax had been adopted by 457 cities and towns, and in the following year an Imperial increment tax was introduced.

In Australia, Queensland has exempted all improvements, and the other states are following.

New Zealand began with a graduated land tax in 1891.

Turning to the Dominion, the article points out that in British Columbia since 1892, municipalities could not tax on more than 50 per cent of the value of improvements, and the Government has declared that all Provincial revenues will be raised from the land.

In Alberta by an act last year all municipal taxes are to be levied on the cash value of the land only.

In Saskatchewan a new act requires rural municipalities to tax land only, and to tax unoccupied lands at a higher rate.

In Ontario, 300 municipalities have petitioned for power to reduce taxes on improvements.

The deductions of the writer are very interesting. He says:—

"In contrast with these gradual, patient British and Colonial attainments, the record of the United States for actual achievement is a comparative blank. This condition in the birthplace and home of the great expounder himself is not easy to account for.

"The chief factor in the practical attitude of the two nations is the difference between the English and the American methods of procedure. In England the voters begin at once to discuss among themselves and within themselves the advantages of the land tax, and straightway, by the very cohesion of a common thought, they set about to get it, with, as it were, one heart and voice, by enactment of land laws. In this country the voters are of different type; they are mostly too busy to concern themselves with making even their own laws. Consequently the cause has been consigned to scattered organizations, which have proceeded to discuss the theoretical possibilities and impossibilities and probabilities of every phase of the Land Tax question, combined with other questions more or less related, to the end of the catalogue.

"The moral is that education and not partisan propaganda is the surest path to the triumph of that economic justice which alone can solve our economic problems."

It is satisfactory to see a magazine of the standard of the "Outlook" thus point out the way in which public opinion in the British Empire is gradually formed, and then changes the laws without any great outburst of public feeling.

Like most other reforms, that of the taxation of land is being urged forward—not by its ardent advocates, but by the entirely selfish attitude of the land speculator.

A Powerful Monopoly

The power of some of the monopolies which operate public utilities, great as it is, is being discounted by the creation of "holding companies." These have been formed to accentuate the power of their component companies by combining.

The old Cataract Company, for instance, was bad enough. It secures power at Decew Falls, near Hamilton, Ont., and was credited with having the lowest cost of production. But, as it formerly controlled the City of Hamilton, Ont., and had great power in London, Ont., it was able to sell power at the highest price that prevailed in the Province. Of course, its wings have been clipped by the Hydro-Electric Commission, and by its gradually losing control of some city Councils. But it is now controlled by the Dominion Power and Transmission Company.

This is a "Holding Company" which controls the following Companies:

Hamilton Radial Electric Rwy.
Brantford and Hamilton Elec. Rwy.
Hamilton Street Rwy.
Hamilton and Dundas Street Rwy.
H. Grimsby and Beamsville Rwy.
H. Elec. Light and Cataract Power Co.
Dundas Electric Co.
Lincoln Electric Co.
Western Counties Elec. Co.
Brantford Electric and Operating Co.
Welland Electric Co.
Hamilton Terminals Co.

The Company's net earnings for 5 years have been:—

1908.....	\$625,671
1909.....	\$727,747
1910.....	\$861,323
1911.....	\$1,020,643
1912.....	\$1,204,000

Thus the earnings in 1912 are 90 per cent. larger than in 1908. And as 64 per cent of the earnings come from railways and lighting, it means that the public were paying last year nearly double to the Company, compared with 1908.

The question arises, how much was the Company giving to the public in increased accommodation and better service in return for this enormous increase?

Professional Accounting

The city of Edmonton, Alta., has fallen into line as to the advisability of having its municipal accounts audited by a firm which is not only independent, but also fully competent to do the work satisfactorily and to give a report which will not be prejudiced nor cynical. The firm chosen is Mess. Macintosh and Hyde, whose head office is in Montreal, and who recently completed an audit of the books of the City of Calgary, Alta., which we noticed in a recent issue. The need of civic auditing which is both independent and competent is gaining ground everywhere.