

Denmark

THE EVOLUTION OF CITIZENSHIP AND ADVANCEMENT OF HENRY GEORGE'S IDEAS

WHEN political suffrage succeeded the absolute monarchy in Denmark, the feeling of responsibility on account of this new freedom prompted the more advanced among the younger generation to follow their great leader, Grundtvig, in giving the people an education which would enable it to find its way and solve its problems to its own best advantage.

The Danish Folk-High-schools were established with the purpose of making citizens out of subjects, to gather the different classes around a common conception of the high destiny of a self-reliant people, of which all individual members have equal opportunities and equal responsibility.

No definite science could be found to avail for such a purpose. There were no *civics* to be taught, everything was in a turmoil. The first problem was to awake an appetite, to create a state of mind so receptive, so acquisitive that each individual would want to work out the problem and acquire the necessary information for himself.

To this end—awakening—the young leaders found Poetry, History, Mythology—not the strange, classic, but our own nordic traditions, good. And luckily, among the pioneers men of genius, who wrote poetry, made lovely music, melodies in which to sing the poetry, a true renaissance of art took place, the fountain of history and folklore was made available to the whole people through songs learned by the young folks at their "Highschool", at which growing numbers—especially from the rural districts—were enrolled for the short terms of 3 or 5 months. Taught mainly by "the living word," as Grundtvig called the word of mouth with the *spirit* behind it, these young people were truly awakened to thirst for the truth.

Not only awakening, but a sense of direction, calling for knowledge of the aim of life, and the illumination of the higher purpose, to light the way, was what the schools tried to give their students, and any science, any knowledge which would serve this purpose, would be used according to the ability of the instructors of each school. The physical laws of nature as well as the natural laws which govern human relationships and social life, biology as well as geology, in short, anything in which the teacher has enough insight to enable him to make it serve as a means of pointing out the underlying laws, the laws which we must know in order to govern the forces of nature or the forces of our mutual relations in the home or as a people—or as humanity.

This free adult schooling—(there is practically no illiteracy in Denmark, so no attention need be paid to the elementary education)—no doubt has paved the way for an easier understanding of the universal problems of mankind, a peculiar ability to grasp—for instance—the idea

of Henry George—on the part of so many of our Danish farmers. It has certainly been instrumental in guarding our farmers against taking the wrong road at a very critical time in the economic history of our people. In the early eighties, when cheap corn coming from America made it impossible to raise grain profitably, and when the farmers of other countries asked for and received from their governments the so-called protection of a tariff duty, raising the price of imported corn and thus enabling the native farmers to keep up their own prices, the farmers of Denmark had vision enough to see the other way, the right one, as has been proved. They resolutely took advantage of the cheap corn, gave up grain farming and changed their system—almost over night, as the histories of peoples go—to a farm industry, raising cattle and pigs, erecting co-operative dairies and pork factories, so that the very latest and best machinery for improving productions was available to the farmers, on equal terms and to the same advantage whether their holdings were large or small. Many other activities have since been organized on the same basis, eliminating a number of unproductive middle men and engaging the best fitted in the service of the rural co-operative commonwealth. The same vision kept the farmers from falling for the danger of discriminating in favor of the large landholder when the question of governing their co-operative societies came up. A few were in favor of "voting according to the number of cows," etc., but this idea was ridiculed out of every assembly. It is not the cows that are to govern us—whether a man has a large financial status or a small one, his interest in the good management of joint affairs is the same, and his brains may be just as good with one cow as with a hundred or more—so the man votes (or the woman).

But the enormous rise in land values because of the profitable system of rural industry has brought another problem to the front: that of disposing of the young generation, now growing up on the land, but with little prospect of being able to pay the price of admission and still keep enough out of the production to live decently. It is hard for the farmer to get help—because the young folks, though they naturally prefer the comfortable and enjoyable social life of their villages—will under the circumstances go to the cities and get into some trade by which they can see their way to earn enough to build homes for themselves. The easy access to making a living in the cities is, however, to some extent delusion. Out of the comparatively high wages must come the much higher urban taxes and the dues to the trades unions, so highly organized that they may be considered compulsory—in order to alleviate the growing *unemployment*. And the exodus from the country, tending to exaggerate the population of the cities—Copenhagen has one fifth of the whole population of the country—makes it rather profitable to speculate in building sites, thus reducing building activi-

ties, etc. There has been great housing famine while at the same time large numbers of unemployed workmen have been willing to build houses. This is mainly accounted for by the unbusinesslike legislation of our country. We have been so foolish as to tax improvements on land, instead of taxing land only, according to its value.

However, this is gradually changing, thanks to the lesson we have learned from America. Some of our forefathers came over here to get their economic freedom, relieving the pressure and reducing the high cost of access to the land for those who stayed at home. This is no longer possible. But from the greatest of all Americans, Henry George, we have learned the lesson of how to make access to the land available equally for each new generation and thus secure for ourselves that economic freedom in our own country, which is denied to newcomers in this United States. The policy of Henry George, to abolish taxation on industry, giving wages a larger buying capacity and capital invested in production more inducements to employ labor, as well as less risk in producing—and to take instead of taxes a toll from the land—all land—according to the value put on it by human demand for each foot or acre—will serve our purpose in this day and time, for the next step in the evolution of citizenship.

Through the organized effort during twenty-five years of the Henry George Society, preceded by the translating of "Progress and Poverty," and the writing and speaking about Henry George's Idea by Jakob E. Lange, S. Berthelsen and a few other early pupils of the American philosopher, every man, woman and child in our country has at least heard of Henry George and his proposition, his books are translated and have been sold in many thousands of copies and his picture hangs on the wall of many a Danish Husmand, as we call our small farmer, as well as in a number of high schools.

All our political parties except the most utterly conservative, that of speculators in private privilege, have some measure of this reform in their platforms, abolition of taxes, replaced by a toll or duty on the value of land—or site value, as the urban term would be. And on election day there will be much interpellation of the candidates as to their position toward this policy. But the older parties are more or less bound by traditions of a paternalistic legislation, appropriating each as much as possible for the benefit of the class of voters each caters to—a sort of bribery which it seems difficult to exterminate. Still, in 1922 a tax on property (national) was changed to a toll on land values only, freeing improvements. And in 1926 another law was passed, enabling the municipalities to change their income taxes to duties on land values—site values, which are community created and so of course naturally belong to the community, or as some say, are created collectively by all the citizens and should be taken for the benefit of all by the collective government. Some hold, that when private interests, private business, is

divorced from public government there will be very few expenses of governing, and those few will pay for themselves, so that under natural circumstances there will always be a surplus from the dues collected, the annual rent from the land, and that this surplus can only be utilized to advantage by giving it in charge of the citizens themselves, in equal portions.

The particular advantage of this to the community would be, that it might serve as a fund from which the children could free their parent—the mother—from other duties of social service during the years in which they need her care, that it would pay for their schooling (for which purpose the American commonwealth originally set apart school lands, since swallowed up in most places, for purposes of private speculation, but in others still available) and it would enable grown persons, able to live from the product of their labor, to set apart their rent income from the common property for their old age.

This seems a natural and just division—and whether the fund be administered individually or collectively—would answer to the needs of a modern society, it would be justice instead of public charity, which is a terrible danger, and one of the many destructive ways of trying to justify getting something for nothing. Those who get unearned incomes think they are paying something back; they are in reality only putting extra burdens on the farmer and the consumer, and taking their own part back in the form of added value to their land or higher prices on their protected industry products.

This slow progress is unsatisfactory, and since we have proportionate representation in our country, though in a modified form, the radical element have established a new party, grown out of the League of Justice, and at the first election had two candidates elected to parliament. These two are doing rather intelligent work—and may have some influence in helping the radical elements in the older parties to progress more swiftly, especially since an intelligent minority, being the balance of power, on occasion may assert itself to some effect.

The reason for expecting the Danish people to be among the first to carry these rational legislative reforms to their logical conclusion is not that we are the first, or even that we have taken longer steps than others toward this goal, but simply that the liberal traditions of our ruling class, the farmers, their comparatively high education, their habits of self-reliance and their familiarity with government through carrying on their co-operative business for so long, make it comparatively certain that, once started on this road to economic salvation, they will travel it consistently and make secure for the whole people that liberty of action and freedom of thought which is necessary for all progress.

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