

## SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN HUNGARY

ADDRESS BY DR. ROBERT BRAUN

We Hungarian Single Taxers find that Henry George's idea of taxing land values in order ultimately to abolish private property in land needs absolutely no improvement. It is good enough as it stands. We were from the beginning absolutely opposed to all exemptions, gradations, increment duties, etc. We are willing to compromise on any other point, for instance, as to the percentage of the land values to be taken to begin with for public purposes, as to the frequency of re-valuation, and so on. What we are absolutely opposed to is a compromise on the question of principle.

There is no more essential part of democracy than the restoration of Nature's gift to the people. Everything else is a side issue. Experience is the most costly teacher, but fools will take no other lesson. And I am sorry to say that it is this teacher that has taught us, by way of revolutions in recent years in my country, that the mere conferring of political rights on classes hitherto without any rights, is far from meaning their emancipation. Parliamentarism is an English invention and the result of an evolution of many centuries, and it is accompanied by a spirit of tolerance not to be found in any other country in the world. On the Continent it is otherwise. The tendency of the Government is to exterminate the Opposition—sometimes by physical means—and the tendency of the Opposition is to start a revolution. If there is a possibility of solving the present economic and political crisis in a peaceable way, it will be solved in the United Kingdom.

But we cannot wait for some hundred years for the political education of our masses. Something has to be done in the meanwhile. Let me tell you something of the social structure of my country. Hungary is a country ruled by a landed aristocracy with hardly any influence opposed to it. About 70 per cent of the whole population is agricultural, and about 30 per cent of the whole population is illiterate. Though there are independent peasant freeholders, they are politically uneducated and are quite unorganized. The majority of the agricultural population are either landless or are unable to make a living on their own land. The middle classes are especially weak politically and most of them follow blindly the social ideals of the aristocracy. There is but one politically and completely well-organized class, the industrial labourers; and they are Socialists with hardly any exception. As in this country, the Radicals and the Labour Party are for the Taxation of Land Values.

In one respect, we compare favourably with many more democratic countries. There is scarcely any community or municipality in Hungary that is without revenue-yielding public lands. In many cases this land is of very substantial value. Thus in Budapest, about 30 per cent of the land value is in the hands of the public—not streets or public parks but real site value of occupied land. There have been attempts to alienate this publicly-owned land but I am glad to say that for the past twenty years or more, the idea has been favoured neither by the Government nor by public opinion.

Considering the existing political structure of Hungary, you will understand that it is in the cities where most can be done for land values taxation. There is the line of least resistance.

When I came to this country twenty-four years ago, I was already a convinced Single Taxer. I had read the works of Henry George before I had met a single English-speaking person. This Conference is certainly a great inspiration to Dr. Pikler and to me. No reading of books or reviews could have given us that feeling of optimism and activity, which evidently prevails among Single Taxers in so many other countries. It will increase our own optimism and our desire to work for the movement. But all this optimism and desire for activity will not induce us to take risks. Our watchword will be: No compromise in matters of principle and no risks in the application of these principles.

### DISCUSSION

It was found necessary to adjourn the discussion to Sunday afternoon to hear Dr. Pikler and Dr. Braun again, and have their replies to many questions. That meeting took place in the Hall of Ruskin College. Dr. McDougall was again in the Chair, and presided over a very well-attended gathering.