

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

LAND SPECULATION IN
NEW YORK STATE

Remarkable light is thrown upon the extent of land speculation in the vicinity of New York City by an investigation made recently by the Institute of Public Administration for the guidance of Westchester County Commission in the preparation of a new charter for the local government of the county. The data thus obtained have particular value in that they were compiled for another purpose, and may be assumed to be free from the bias attendant upon the compilation of statistics for the express purpose of supporting a particular thesis.

Westchester County lies along the Hudson River to the north of New York City. It comprises four cities, eighteen towns and numerous other local government units, and has a population of 521,000 persons.

Out of 222,802 parcels of land assessed for taxation it was found that 132,124 or nearly 60 per cent were vacant. The total assessed value of all these parcels (including the value of improvements) was 1,756 million dollars. The valuation of the vacant parcels was 197 million dollars.

The report says: "The intense activity in subdivision which prevailed during the boom period created an ever-mounting level of market prices both for lots and acreage which, after a time, assumed such stability that even commercial banks were deluded in their estimates of the values of such properties, and backed the promoters of subdivisions with substantial loans. As long as the artificial conditions created by the boom

continued, there was hope that the vacant lots bought to-day could be resold at a profit to-morrow. The possibility of a profitable resale rather than a desire to improve helped to maintain a short-lived demand for the ever-growing supply." And again "How many decades must elapse before the county can hope to have a population large enough to fill up its prematurely subdivided empty spaces?" We may add the comment that while this state of affairs exists, vegetable and other products are being carried past these empty spaces to feed the inhabitants of New York City.

In 1915 the taxable value of real estate was \$1,200 per head of population, in 1934 after the decline in values had set in it was \$3,371. Among the causes given for the increase is "the pricing of lands within the county, by residents and non-residents alike, not on the basis of present uses but of a too optimistic discounting of anticipated future uses."

Over 25 per cent of the large volume of tax arrears is in respect of vacant lands. Another evil is the extent of public indebtedness. On this the report says: "How much of the debt outstanding was incurred for the construction of public works to serve the 132,000 pieces of vacant land? The answer to that question would be enlightening. Unfortunately, not enough work has been done to make a precise answer possible. The data at hand indicates, however, that a relationship exists between the aggregate overlapping debt burden per capita, and the extent to which premature subdivision has taken place in the various towns."

It is to Mr Philip Cornick of New York, who has taken a special interest in this matter, that we are indebted for copy of the report.

ROBERT BRAUN

One of the pioneers in the Henry George movement in Europe has passed away whose death is greatly deplored—Robert Braun of Hungary, a victim to influenza on 12th February. He was the late Vice-Director of the City Library in Buda Pest and known not only in his native land but in foreign countries by his sociological works. His great contributions to the literature of our movement were his translations, made more than twenty years ago, of *Progress and Poverty*, *Social Problems*, and *Protection or Free Trade* by Henry George and *The Story of My Dictatorship* by Berens and Singer. Joseph Fels, with whom Dr Braun was intimately associated, helped to make these translations possible. Dr Braun made more than one visit to this country and John Paul too was counted among his best friends. Most notable among these visits was his attendance at the International Conference in Oxford in 1923, along with Dr Julius J. Pikler, the colleague who has been closest of all to him. In later years Dr Braun had a life of much trial and anxiety during the disturbances through which his country has passed, and we are all the happier to have the clipping from the Buda Pest paper which pays a handsome tribute to his career as professor and writer. He was in his 58th year.

ALFRED SCHÄR

Grievous news has been received of the sudden death of Alfred Schär of Hamburg, one of the active and devoted band of young men in Germany who have done what they could in face of many handicaps to promote the ideas of Henry George. That he was admired and respected was shown by the large gathering who

attended the last sad rites, Dr Arnold Schwarz from Berlin being among the mourners. Alfred Schär was a hard worker, his pen never idle in his researches and his writings on matters relating to trade, housing and land policies. He attended the Copenhagen International Conference in 1926 and as a Hamburg member of the "Bodenreform Bund" (the Land Reform Union) kept its ideas alive, making great occasion when in 1927 Mr Hennessy and colleagues visited the city to hold meeting under joint auspices of the Bund and the International Union. Regretfully his school duties prevented his attendance at the recent London Conference, where he was missed, but in his absence he was elected a Vice-President of the Union. It is a sore bereavement for his widow and son and daughter and to them we extend our heartfelt sympathy.

ARGENTINA

M. J. S. writes:—

The monthly Georgeist literary review *Nueva Argentina* (Peru 84, Buenos Aires) for December, 1936, has many references to the activities of "Accion Libertador," which does not fail to point out the connection of other movements for freedom of thought and act with land fiscally liberated. Mention is made of a proposal by the State Government of Cordoba, which appears to comply with constitutional rulings, to impose an increased land (capital) tax of $\frac{1}{2}$ to 8 per cent on larger properties. Revenue to be laid out in purchase of land to be let in perpetuity at the economic rent. These proposals involving differentiation and some kind of land purchase scheme indicate that the problem has not been rightly thought out. Prof. Jorge Gustavo Silva, of the Faculty of Justice and Labour in the University of Chile has a well considered study on "Where is the increase in land value?"

A kindly, if critical, mention of the London Conference