

THE SINGLE TAX REVIEW

A Record of the Progress of Single Tax and Tax Reform
Throughout the World.

THE BODENREFORM CONFERENCE AT BIELEFELD.

(For the Review)

BY JOSEPH DANZIGER

It would be difficult to say what was the most impressive moment at the war-time conference of the Bund Deutscher Bodenreformer held at Bielefeld in Westphalia, on October 1st to 5th, 1915. There were three unusually responsive scenes, the first being in the Bielefelder Rathaus, a modern building which retains in its massive stone stair-cases and its low, flat-ceilinged assembly hall, the best characteristics of the German Renaissance. One would expect a slim attendance at a Single Tax Conference in such turbulent times as these, when everyone who is not at the front is straining every energy to bring the war to a successful and early conclusion. Everyone has some special task to perform now, aside from the ordinary demands of everyday life, and everyone's means is taxed to the uttermost in the support of one or more of the numerous foundations established for the relief of military and civilian sufferers from the war.

In spite of these distractions, the number of the delegates was surprisingly and gratifyingly large. On the second day of the conference when the large assembly-hall of the Rathaus was placed at the disposal of the delegates, it seemed as though everyone in Bielefeld had taken a day off in order to get in touch with the movement. The great hall was crowded to the limit, people standing closely packed at the rear, the galleries were overflowing and the corridors of the building were thronged with people, waiting patiently for a possible chance that some auditor might leave and give one of them an opportunity to slip into his place.

To one who has for many years watched the development of the Single Tax movement in the world, this meeting was not so impressive for its size, as for the fervent spirit in which the people came to hear. Recalling the second Single Tax Conference held at Chicago in '93, one remembers that there was a big crowd there also; as well as some very big men. Henry George and

Father McGlynn were the leading lights, but there were Kier Hardie, Post, Maguire of California, Williams of St. Louis, with the booming voice, young Frank Stephens, of Philadelphia, and his friend Stephenson and others whom memory does not recall off hand, including the Chicago crowd of course; White, Cooling, the Moeller Brothers, the Maguires and scores of others, all good fighting men, but the people who came to hear George and McGlynn did so chiefly out of curiosity. Here was a fine visionary scheme, they thought, involving much intricate use of economic terminology which they only half understood. While many agreed that it was a magnificent programme there was always the pessimistic: "You never can get it."

At Bielefeld the effect was different. As President Adolph Damaschke said in his opening address: "It is not means that we are after but ends. We want the land of Germany to be the heritage of the whole German people." Any one can understand and agree with so fundamental a truth, for this latest Bodenreform Conference devoted itself to one theme; the proposed law to establish homesteads for returning soldiers—the Krieger Heimstaetten. There are several million men under arms in Germany—how many, is known only to a few in the big red building in the Moltke Strasse—and under the terms of the proposed law each of them is to have a claim on his state or municipal government for a homestead. These are to be classified according to a man's needs and habits. For the city workman, a house and garden in the suburbs; for the agriculturist, a truck garden near the city or a small farm. The land is to be leased at will to the veteran during his lifetime, or to his widow or children in case of decease. Banks are to be founded under special charter and government supervision, and are to lend the homesteader such money as he needs to acquire a house or other improvements. Such loans are to be made at a moderate interest rate, are not to exceed ninety per cent of the value of the improvements, and shall be guaranteed by the community, which is the owner of the land. All loans shall be amortized in the course of a long period of years.

Instead of paying pensions as we have done, and because Germany wants a strong vigorous generation to succeed the one that this war has ravaged, the rent is not to be increased during the occupancy of the first tenant, but should his lease lapse through death or removal, the land will be re-valued for the next comer, and should no more soldiers wish to take up the homesteads, all others will have to pay the full annual rental value. Anyone familiar with social conditions in England or Germany during the so-called Dark Ages, will recognize in this plan a modernized version of a scheme of land tenure as old as the Germanic race. Nevertheless, it is thoroughly applicable to modern conditions, and will not run counter to the popular objections to confiscation. It squares exactly with the principles of Henry George, as it will tend to decrease land-values, will give people access to the land, take them out of tenements and put them amid gardens under the free sky. Incidentally it

will provide for the collectivity a huge revenue which now remains in private hands. Above all, these desirable results will be accomplished immediately, though the benefits will be cumulative.

It was this message that the Bielefelders had crowded the hall to hear, and hearing they rejoiced. The brave boys in field-grey were to be rewarded for their valor. The home-coming soldier was to have a tangible share in that soil for which he had been fighting so valiantly. The men who presented this idea to them were men of standing and importance; army officers of all ranks, including that of lieutenant-general; important government officials with impressive German titles; members of the Reichstag from every party except the extreme left; (the Social Democrats oppose every reform that is not socialism), there were university professors a plenty, and it must be remembered that in Germany a professor is looked upon with respect akin to reverence. After the meeting, one heard the Krieger Heimstätten being discussed all over town, in the streets, the cafes, in front of war bulletins; wherever two or three were gathered together, there was the plan of the Bodenreformer uppermost. It is something tangible, that takes hold of men and grips. At last we have a programme that does not require an intimate knowledge of political economy in order that it be understood.

The next day we visited a spot that marked the high-tide of Roman conquest in Europe. It was here that Arminius and his skin-clad warriors triumphed over the Roman eagles, and "Augustus wept for his legions." This Autumn, on the high hills, crowned with the ancient oaks of the Teutoburger Forest, the sun of liberty was shining as brightly as it did in that older day which Henry George has apostrophized so eloquently. At the top of the hill where we had assembled towering to a height that rivals the Liberty Statue in New York Harbor, is a monument to that leader or Herr Mannst whom the Romans called Arminius. A short flight of stone steps leads down from the base of the pedestal and some two hundred yards off a stone hemicycle converts the intervening level space into a natural amphitheatre. At the head of the stairs was a speaker's stand, and at its foot a dais had been erected upon which were two chairs of state. Both the stand and the dais were draped with the black-white-red of Germany and the orange and red of Lippe-Detmold, one of the twenty-two states comprising the German Empire. The reigning Prince of Lippe-Detmold, his brother, nearly everyone in the residence city near by and several train loads from Bielefeld, all had gathered about the speakers stand to hear once more, this "glad message of great joy." The presence of a reigning monarch at a Bodenreform meeting is considered of great significance. Such men never lend their presence to an occasion without first assuring themselves that it is something that they can consistently approve of.

More important than the presence of royalty is the enthusiasm with which this latest proposal of the Bodenreformer meets with wherever it is made, no matter what the social standing of the listener. The thought of

suddenly placing several million German families in their own homes is one that fires the imagination. Like every great industrial country, the cities of Germany have been growing at the expense of the country. It has long been a much mooted question, how to get the people back to the land. Here at one stroke is an answer to more than one problem; at once a reward for the nation's wonderful patriotism and endurance, a rendering of simple justice to the people and a return to an age-old system of land-tenure. Nor is it merely an academic demonstration as a well-known American Single Taxer pronounced it. For instance, the City of Berlin, like all German communities, municipal and state, owns immense tracts of land adjoining the improved sections, served by an excellent suburban railroad, and amounting to fifty thousand acres altogether. By dividing these holding into quarter acre tracts, each homesteader could have a garden large enough to supply his family with all the vegetables they need during the year. In addition is to be noted the hygienic effects of taking people out of the crowded tenements and the moral consequences of placing children in real homes. Within the available area, two hundred thousand Berlin workingmen's families could be established under their own vine and fig trees within a short time, and counting the German average of six to a family, there would be 1,200,000 people, or nearly half the population of the City of Berlin, living on their own land. The other municipalities of Greater Berlin own relatively larger tracts, and could provide for their citizens even more bountifully. Schmargendorf, a more exclusive district, could establish homesteads for professional men and others in better circumstances. The Province of Brandenburg and the Kingdom of Prussia also own extensive areas which could be converted into truck-gardens or small farms, transforming agricultural laborers into a yeoman population.

Some six hundred and fifty municipalities, each containing a population of more than five thousand, own over 125,000 square miles of land, not including forest preserves. The fiscal effects of settling people on this vast domain would be incalculable, both indirectly as regards the influence of public opinion regarding the ownership of land values and directly drawing attention to the enormous revenues that the economic rent would ultimately furnish. Another powerful influence on German thought arises from their great love of children which they express in a most pragmatic manner by an annual birth-rate of 850,000. They place great store on the moral effect resulting from giving children a real home, one that will supply a mental and physical stimulus, that will take them off the streets and put them in the clean fields and gardens; a home that they can look back to with tender memories in after years, one that a loving Fatherland has provided them with, instead of four rooms and a bath which is the best that the average German workman can hope for under present conditions.

On the last day of the conference the delegates visited Bethel by invitation of Pastor von Bodelschwingh, who is its active head. The father of the present

leader founded the colony soon after "Progress and Poverty" was written. Originally he intended it as a home for epileptics and this is still an important part of its functions. But as the colony grew and he acquired more land, it gradually assumed the appearance of a Single Tax colony, and there are besides several industries owned co-operatively. A great hospital now devote dchiefly to wounded soldiers and a village of houses and gardens and several farms, also work cooperatively. There are some ten thousand people living at Bethel, the householders paying the economic rent for their land and owning the improvements. These latter vary from a simple cottage costing 3,700 marks to a more pretentious villa for which ten times that sum was paid. (It would be unfair to quote prices in dollars, as much better buildings can be had in Germany for a given sum than in America. The same is true of land). The convalescents, both physical and mental, live with the colonists, where their health is completely conserved under more invigorating conditions than would obtain in an institution. Von Bodelschwingh is a firm believer in the blessings of work, and every one who is strong enough is given something to do in the shops or the farms. Many of the epileptics work in places where one would imagine it unsafe for such people, but the results have been very satisfactory. Experience proves that such occupations encourage self-reliance and prevent introspection, a condition essential to the cure of these unfortunates.

Those that have visited Fairhope, Arden or one of Fiske Warren's enclaves, will recall the impression of a strong democratic spirit prevailing there. The same is apparent in Bethel as well, especially as exemplified in the person of Friederich von Bodelschwingh, who has the same kindly expression of passionate helpfulness whether speaking to a bed-ridden epileptic boy of ten or to a general or "excellency" among the visitors.

There were only three hours that could possibly be devoted in hurrying through the place, and space does not permit a detailed review of it here. Before we left, a short service was held in the dignified stone church of the colony. Its interior is simple but impressive, and as there is no organ, a band rendered the music from a podium where the altar usually is. After a short talk—not a sermon—by the pastor, the congregation of eight hundred wounded soldiers, their nurses and the delegates, slowly filed out while the band played the "Netherlands Thanksgiving Hymn," the solemn exultation of whose music might be such as resounded in the city of David when the ark was brought to Zion. The congregation took up the words as only a German assemblage can sing; "Wir treten zum Beten vor Gott dem Gerechten," and they passed on out, the song gradually becoming muffled beyond the thick stone walls.

As I sat in the silent church, I thought of the little, broad-shouldered sailorman who went to San Francisco and learned the printer's trade; how his Great Idea had sprung up from a heart that ached for the sufferings of

humanity; how like that Other, lover of his kind, the Carpenter, he gladly sacrificed his life that the truth which he had tried to make clear might find more ready acceptance. His idea had gone out into the world, with that gift of tongues which every truth possesses, and here in a far-off country, among a people that speak a different language, but whose language of the heart is the same as his, his name is held sacred and his idea is nearing accomplishment; not perhaps as he applied it to American conditions, but as it can best be applied in Germany.

As I sat there, the impressive scenes of the Conference reenacted themselves; in the Rathaus, where men whom the state and the intellectual world had honored with their highest titles, were gathered together in the name of the Prophet of San Francisco; at the Herrmann Monument, where a crowned head bent low to listen to his truths; and at Bethel, where those truths were being exemplified in simple Christian faith. There re-echoed those words with which Henry George closed his great book and which had been repeated that morning: "Und die an Ormuzds Seite kaempfen, moegen sie auch einander nicht kennen, irgendwo, irgendwann wird das Namensverzeichnis verlesen." —Berlin, Germany.

SOCIALISM AND THE SINGLE TAX.

ADDRESS OF JOHN T. McROY BEFORE THE BENNINGTON, VERMONT, SOCIALIST PARTY LOCAL, MR. JOHN SPARGO PRESIDING.

In appearing before you today, I must at the outset disavow all purpose of playing the part of an apostle intent upon your conversion. My scope tonight shall be far less ambitious and I shall attempt merely to prove the merit of Single Tax as a step in social advance. It is not my purpose to draw any contrast between the theories of Single Tax and of Socialism. I shall not consider these two theories as competitors for popular favor, but rather as aids to each other in the development of social opinion. For it is clearly evident that were it not for the colossal efforts of the socialist movement, there would hardly be a mental attitude among the people at large fit to understand sympathetically the propaganda of other forms of radicalism. And in so far as other radical movements have been benefited by the steady growth of socialistic convictions, it may be of value to determine to what extent socialism may itself be benefited by those very doctrines.

My outline of the Single Tax this evening will not include its pretensions to a solution of our industrial problems. In truth, the word "solution" is a very inconvenient one in economic questions. We speak of solving a social question in the same sense as the solving of a mathematical problem. The use of the same word "problem" for two different situations seems, no doubt, to