

OBITUARY

Mrs. CHARLES H. BATTY

The many friends of Charles H. Batty will sympathise with him in his bereavement, Mrs. Batty having died in hospital on April 12 after serious illness. Our sympathies go also to her son, Arthur, and all within the family. Every one who knew her cherished her for her sweet and gentle nature and her understanding and ardent sympathies. A dear and much beloved lady has departed, one of that company of whom it is written they selflessly shed the radiance of benignant lives. Charles Batty may be proud and happy in having had such a partner, much as he will miss her now. She graced with lively interest so many meetings including the International Conferences held to advance our cause, and there will be those abroad in Australia, Canada and the U.S.A. who treasure the memory of that almost "ambassadorial" journey that those two undertook together in 1950. And it is at 4 Great Smith Street that a very deep sense of this loss is felt.

J. A. SIMONET

The French League and the International Union have lost an able and devoted supporter by the death of Mr. J. A. Simonet of Mulhouse which occurred on April 3. He was a Vice-President of the Union, deeply interested in all its work, and it was only ill-health that had prevented him from attending the Conferences at Odense in 1952 and at St. Andrews last year. Our sympathy goes not only to his family but also to his associates in the French League and particularly among them to M. Daudé Bancel and M. Toubeau deprived of the assistance of such an eminent colleague.

ROMULO S. COBANERA

Romulo S. Cobanera, of La Plata, Argentina, a former Vice-President of the International Union, died on March 8. Mr. Alberto Alves de Lima wrote us in memory of him: "I feel deeply sad for this event. Besides the respect I had for his cultivated spirit, he was a very good friend of mine. It is indeed a big loss for us here in Argentina. He was finishing a book when he was caught by a sudden cerebral-hæmorrhage stroke. As soon as his family's problems are settled, we should know the importance of his contribution to our cause."

Because of the state of his health, Mr. Cobanera had not sought re-election as a vice-president. Not able to engage in the International Union's activities, he yet gave them his enthusiastic commendation, repeating in his latest letter the hope and encouragement that dominated his life—some time surely "there would be implanted in the minds of men the conception of the Kingdom of God and his righteousness by which all else may be added unto us; obedience, in fact, to the law of the natural order, that which the science of political economy teaches as reconstructed, clarified and presented by Henry George." That shall be his testament to those who follow him and it was most sincere.

W. PENNEFATHER

A keen supporter has been lost to the movement by the death of Commander W. Pennefather, R.N. (Retired), of Gillitts in Natal. We have the grievous news from his widow to whom we convey our sincere sympathy. It could have been but a brief illness for only a few days before his death he had written us with his usual intense interest. The

original contact with Mr. Pennefather came about by his accidentally picking up (in November, 1953) a complete edition of *Progress and Poverty* published by the Henry George Foundation of Great Britain in 1943. He wrote to our then address, the G.P.O. tracing us to where we are now, and he wished to know if we were still in existence. Naturally, very much correspondence ensued. Obtaining a copy of the new condensed edition of the book, he expressed his delight with it and he ordered and paid for 100 copies, causing them to be distributed to various institutions and individuals throughout the Union of South Africa where he hoped the seed would fructify. With him as a constant reader of LAND & LIBERTY and member of the International Union, we had an unusually able co-worker whose advice and assistance will be sorely missed.

A. W. M.

Johannesburg:
Municipal Trading and the Rates

Since 1916 the rates in Johannesburg have been levied exclusively on the value of land apart from buildings and improvements under power of legislation drafted by Mr. F. A. W. Lucas, Q.C., the president of our International Union. In addition, the city council conducts various trading services. As a result there are not lacking interested parties who seek to "keep down" the land-value rates by increasing the revenue derived from municipal trading. All such attempts are contested by Mr. Lucas and in the following letter which appeared in the *Johannesburg Star* on March 12 he argues against the proposed higher charges for electricity which it is estimated will produce an increased annual revenue of £545,000.

"In whose interests are the City Council proposing these new charges? Certainly not in the interest of the people of small means. According to the council's 'Vade Mecum' for 1955, the estimated profit for this year from the supply of electricity will be £500,000. The new charges are, therefore, not needed to cover a loss in that department. They will, in fact, make the annual profit more than £1,000,000. That amount is intended to be used in relief of rates.

"It is amazing that our councillors have so little appreciation of the value of the means our system of the rating of site values of land gives them to reduce the cost of living. A tax on such values is the only tax which does not raise the cost of living. It reduces it. It brings pressure to bear on the owners of vacant land to bring it into use, thus increasing the supply of available sites and encouraging building and its allied industries. This all helps to lower rents.

"The proposed new charges for electricity will raise directly the cost of living and the costs of production. Is it not strange that our public bodies, from the Government down, always choose for taxation things which are produced by human labour, so increasing their cost and leave untaxed, as far as they can, values like land values which are not due in any way to the work or efforts of the owner? Such values are created entirely by the presence and activities of the community and should, in any sensible country, belong to it. We, I think foolishly and unjustly, try to exempt them from taxation and tax industry and thrift.

"My suggestion to the council is that, instead of raising the price of electric current, it obtain the additional revenue required by raising the assessment rate by five-eighths penny. This will yield about the same amount as the proposed charges. By doing this the owners of unused or poorly used land will contribute to the required revenue, instead of escaping, as they will do if it is taken from the users of electricity. The value of such land is due in part to the fact

that there is a supply of electricity. It is only fair that the owners should contribute to the needed revenue.

"By substituting such an increased rate for the proposed charges for electricity the public would benefit. Your article showed that under those charges the bill for a four-roomed house would go up 4s. 8d. a month, that is, £2 16s. a year. Such a house would not occupy land valued at anything like £500 but if we take that as its value a rate of five-eighths penny in the pound would be only £1 6s. a year. The saving would then be at least £1 10s. a year.

"Ratepayers should work this out for themselves on their own figures. If there are city councillors who have the interests of the poorer section of our people at heart here is something they might well fight for in those interests.

"It was significant that in the same issue as your report about the electricity charges there should be a statement that since the latest increase in tram and bus fares there has been a drastic decline in the number of passengers using trams and buses. Perhaps some day public bodies will learn economic sense."

Footnote.—The text of a similar letter from Mr. Lucas dealing with the then proposed increase in municipal tram and bus fares was reprinted from the *Rand Daily Mail* in our June, 1954, issue. His suggestion was disregarded by the Johannesburg City Council but was adopted by Germiston Council.

"Ridiculous" Price for Hockey Pitches

The West Sussex County Council refused to pay £3,774 per acre for 4.3 acres of land (£16,228) required to provide additional playing fields for the Worthing High School for Girls. At present the school has only 8.5 acres, which is five acres less than the standard laid down by the Ministry of Education. The reference back was moved by Ald. J. A. Mason who described the price asked as being "beyond all reason," and seconded by the Duke of Norfolk who thought it was "ridiculous." In view of his vast land-holding, the Duke's opinion carries some weight. Another member found the price "staggering" and the chairman of the education committee admitted that his committee had been "very disturbed" by it. The land was right opposite the school, which meant that there would be none of the transport costs that would follow from buying a few acres outside the town. The recommendation had the full backing of the Worthing Committee for Education. Another member, Cllr. G. A. Russell Purchase, remarked interestingly that he presumed that the fact that the land was adjacent to the school gave the sellers some kind of ransom over it.

A week later the county council approved an alternative proposal costing £5,094 less. This was that only the three middle acres of the land (St. Aubyn's Nurseries) should be purchased, leaving the road frontages free for building development. Thereby the price was reduced from the "ridiculous" figure of £3,774 per acre to the apparently acceptable figure of £3,711 per acre. Cllr. C. P. Mason pointed out that all the council was getting for its money was two hockey pitches and land for a lavatory block, and another member reminded the Council that the cost of enclosing the land with 20 ft. fence to keep hockey balls out of the private house gardens would be considerable.

Is it not "staggering, ridiculous, and beyond all reason" that land so valuable all over the country should lie rate-exempt for years, and that when it is required for municipal purposes an extortionate monopoly price should be paid out of monies derived from rates levied on houses, shops, offices, and other improvements? If rates were levied on the value of land apart from buildings this site would have yielded an annual income to the local authority and its selling

price would have been diminished by the capitalised amount of the annual rate payment. Cases such as this strengthen our demand for the adoption of that policy.

Local Authorities and the F.B.I.

The Convention of Royal Burghs, meeting in Edinburgh on April 3, resolved to seek the abolition of derating as applied to agricultural and industrial subjects. Although previous conventions had made recommendations about derating, they had never before made abolition a matter of principle. *The Scotsman* reported that the convention remitted to their Burgh Administration Committee a proposal that a meeting should be arranged between convention representatives and Scottish members of Parliament at which the case for immediate legislation to abolish derating would be presented.

Coventry City Council at its meeting on April 10 called upon the Government to repeal section 68 of the Local Government Act, 1929, "during the present parliamentary session," according to the *Municipal Journal*, April 13. The effect of rerating in Coventry would be substantial. With the rate poundage of 16s. 3d. the city would receive another £829,000. Alternatively, the council could reduce the city rate to 12s. 11d.

Not surprisingly the Federation of British Industries is in favour of continuing the present derating of industrial and freight properties. In a statement issued on March 21 it declared that derating was both just and necessary. If it was abolished, an extra £75 million a year would be added to the industrial rates bill. The federation's views on the structure of the local authorities and the present rating system had been submitted to the Minister of Housing and Local Government.

Publicity in Malta

The doctrinal statement prepared by Dr. Edward McGlynn—one of the most eloquent and competent testaments to the Henry George philosophy of equal rights to land—was quoted in full by "Gracchus," one of our readers in Malta, in a lengthy article on "The Land Question" in the Catholic English-language journal *The Bulletin* for April 3.

As many readers will know, Dr. McGlynn, a priest in New York, was censored by his superiors and asked to refrain from making further speeches in favour of the taxation of Land Values. He refused to do so, and refused also to go to Rome when requested to do so. Whereupon he was ex-communicated. A commission of five Theologians examined the doctrinal statement and unanimously found that the philosophy preached by Dr. McGlynn was not contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church. Father McGlynn was re-instated in 1892 having satisfied the Pope's legate on all points in his case.

Dr. McGlynn's statement is published in full in our edition of Henry George's *The Condition of Labour* together with the Encyclical Letter entitled *Rerum Novarum* issued by Pope Leo XIII, and the essay "Back to the Land," by Dr. Thomas Nulty, Bishop of Meath. The volume is bound in red cloth boards, fully indexed, 158 pp., price 4s. 0d. from our offices.

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