

## THE NEW YORK CENTENARY CONFERENCE

ALTHOUGH PRE-OCCUPATION with war news prevented the publicity which might reasonably have been expected the International Conference in celebration of the centenary of the birth of Henry George held in New York on 30th and 31st August and 1st and 2nd September under the auspices of the Henry George School of Social Science, the Henry George Foundation of America and the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade must be recorded as undoubtedly successful. It was the first international congress of the followers of Henry George to be held outside Europe, and although the number of delegates present from beyond North America was understandably small, a widely expressed desire was evinced for another similar gathering when circumstances were more propitious.

The events of four crowded and indeed hectic days cannot be summarized within the space at our disposal, and much must be omitted. It was fitting that the conference should be opened and the delegates welcomed to New York by Mayor F. H. La Guardia, who described himself as an ardent disciple and follower of the economic and social philosophy of Henry George. It was also appropriate that at the final luncheon, held at the World's Fair, the conference should be addressed by another of New York's most distinguished citizens, Judge Samuel Seabury, who had been one of Henry George's young lieutenants in the mayoralty campaign of 1897. Mr La Guardia emphasized that Henry George's two mayoralty contests though not resulting in his election had not been vain, and that but for Judge Seabury's campaign to uncover political corruption in New York City his own election and the inauguration of a more efficient and impartial local government would not have been possible. The Mayor was welcomed and introduced by Mrs Anna George de Mille, president of the board of trustees of the Henry George School.

The regular business of the conference then commenced with Mr Bue Björner's presidential address, which as will be seen from the report in another column struck a note appropriate to the circumstances of the time.

The Conference received fraternal greetings from many parts including a message brought personally by Mr E. J. Craigie from colleagues and co-workers in Australia, and by Mr Bue Björner from Denmark; cable from Berlin on behalf of the German Bodenreformers and cable from London, being greetings transmitted by the International Union from centenary gatherings in numerous centres.

At the afternoon session the conference had the pleasure of hearing Mrs Ivy Akeroyd, who like Mr E. J. Craigie, M.P., had travelled half-way round the globe from Australia, Mr Lancaster M. Green of New York, and Mr J. Rupert Mason of San Francisco. Mr Mason discussed the problem of tax delinquency in the United States, pointing out that in their efforts to save the land speculators the States had created a vast no-man's land of unused land to which a good title could not be obtained, and which produced no revenue for the governments and no wealth for the people. It is a problem of terrifying dimensions, which some day must be dealt with if the whole structure of economic life is not to collapse.

In the evening, Rabbi Michael Aaronsohn, gave an address on "Farewell to Magic" in which he decried man's inclination to trust to magic and superstition for the solution of economic problems. Mr Walter Fair-

child, chairman of the Graded Tax Committee of New York City, explained with the aid of most interesting coloured slides the ill effects of New York's existing system of taxation, and the benefits which would follow from reduction of the taxes on buildings and increase of those on land values. Mr Fairchild's address was supplemented by an exhibition in the lobby of the conference hall of valuable old prints and maps illustrating the growth of New York and assembled from the collection of Mr Thomas G. Herendeen.

The second day of the Conference provided an equally varied programme. An appropriate and inspiring note was struck at the morning session in Mr A. C. Campbell's paper entitled "The Man who Invented Plenty" dealing with Henry George as the man who had discovered the economic means by which technical progress could in practice lead to a greater production and a more equitable distribution of wealth. Mr Douglas's paper on "Some Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Land Value Taxation" evoked a keen discussion, and Mr Henry L. Tideman gave an account of the Henry George School of Chicago.

At the afternoon session Mr Will Lissner contributed a valuable paper on "American Exploitation of Fuel and Minerals," Professor Hiram L. Jome spoke with much appreciation on "Henry George: A Lesson in Continuity," and Mr Ernest J. Farmer's paper on "Comparative Testimony from the Canadian Provinces" demonstrated by means of a series of simple statistical indices the relatively greater prosperity of the provinces in which land value taxation had made most progress.

In the evening Mr Donald MacDonald gave a vivid account of economic and social conditions in Alaska, with special reference to the legislation under which mining claims are allotted, and Mr H. Bronson Cowan of Toronto dealt with the Georgeist Approach to Business and Government. The most lively discussion arose on Mr Clarence B. Streit's address entitled "Union Now," in which he gave a summary of the proposal in his book of the same title for a federal union of the principal democracies for the purpose of ensuring peace and prosperity among them. Mr Streit is certainly one of the most intelligent and constructive of the brilliant band of journalists who have reported the proceedings of the League of Nations, and his examination of the weaknesses of that institution deserves careful attention. His critics were not slow to point out that real free trade demands alternative sources of revenue, and that all the alternatives except land value taxation were objectionable, and that in addition the establishment of permanent peace necessitated the abolition of the poverty and inequality within each country which imperilled the functioning of democratic institutions.

The first hour on 1st September was devoted to a business meeting of the International Union. The members received with much regret and appreciation of his past services to the Union Mr Bue Björner's announcement that pressure of other work compelled him to relinquish the office of president. The new president is Mr E. J. Craigie, M.P., who has done so much in Australia to advance the principles for which the Union stands. Mr Ashley Mitchell presented the financial statements. A proposal by Mr Lebuscher to alter the name of the Union to Henry George International Union was defeated, three members voting for and the remainder against. Other resolutions lapsed

for lack of proposer. The election of vice-presidents and executive members followed. It is here very appropriate to pay a warm tribute to the services rendered by the retiring president, Mr Bue Björner, who in his three years of office was unflinching in wise counsel and constant attention to the affairs of the Union.

The remainder of the morning was devoted to the presentation of Conference papers dealing with the progress of the movement in various countries. Much interest was aroused by the paper on the Public Status of Land Value Taxation in Great Britain by Messrs A. W. Madsen and Eustace Davies which was introduced in their absence by Mr Ashley Mitchell. American delegates appeared to have some difficulty in realizing that vacant land and unoccupied property paid no local taxation and no national taxation except death duties in Great Britain. The papers on France by Sam Meyer and A. Daudé-Bancel, on Germany by Dr Kurt Schmidt, on Hungary by Ferdinand Mero, and on Bulgaria by Boris Gudulev were introduced by Mr George Green (Belfast).

The afternoon session was devoted to reports and discussion on various activities of the movement in the United States. Mr Lawson Purdy explained the work of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation. Your reporter omitted to take note of the impressive figures of books by and about Henry George published and circulated, but in that and other ways a fine piece of work has been done. Mr Gilbert M. Tucker explained the work of the Tax Relief Association which is still at an early stage of its endeavours to devise new and simple methods of explaining to the ordinary man just how much he pays and is robbed under existing methods of taxation, and how much better it would be to replace them by a tax on land values. (Incidentally the writer was somewhat grieved to find that he had to pay a sales tax even on the cabled message of greeting sent to the head office of the International Union for rediffusion to the centenary gatherings throughout the world.) The session concluded with an account by Mr Nathan Hillman of the work of the Henry George Fellowship, the discussion of which evoked some lively interchanges of opinion as to its relationship to the school activities.

The day closed with a banquet at the Commodore Hotel, over which Mr C. O. Steele presided and which was addressed by Mr Bue Björner, Mr E. J. Craigie, M.P., Mr Frank Chodorov (Director of the Henry George School of Social Science, New York) and Mr Harry Weinberger. The Hon Peter Witt (Cleveland) was unfortunately unable to be present.

On 2nd September, the actual anniversary of Henry George's birth, Mr Bue Björner accompanied by Mrs Anna George de Mille and others went to Greenwood Cemetery and placed a wreath on Henry George's grave in tribute of admiration from his followers throughout the world.

The final event of the Conference was the luncheon on this day at the World's Fair, at which Mr B. J. Hoffman presided. It was addressed by Mr Jakob E. Lange, who intermingled in an inspiring speech some reminiscences of Henry George, by Judge Samuel Seabury, whose speech we print elsewhere, and by Mr F. C. R. Douglas.

It would be unfitting to conclude this account without acknowledgment of the overwhelming kindness and hospitality shown to the foreign delegation by our American and Canadian colleagues, by the City of New York, and by the reception committee of the World's Fair. The arrangements at the Conference itself were in the hands of an energetic and enthusiastic group of

young men and women who were unstinting in their efforts to command success.

The New York *Herald Tribune* reported the opening session of the Conference at considerable length, especially the address delivered by Mayor La Guardia. The *New York Times* gave much space to the succeeding session and it devoted a thoughtful and generous leader to Henry George on the centenary date. Notable among other papers noticing the Conference was the *Christian Science Monitor*. Well-timed, in the matter of publicity, were also the extensive reviews of Mr Albert Jay Nock's new book *Henry George ; An Essay*, appearing in the *New York Sun*, the *Herald Tribune*, the *N.Y. Times Book Review* and the *N.Y. Times Magazine*.

Sir John and Lady Simon were present at a garden fête in Bradbury Hotel Grounds, North Berwick, on 17th August, in aid of the Blackadder Church Hall Building Fund. Lady Simon said (*Glasgow Herald*) that service should dominate our lives, because service was the rent we paid for the room we occupied on this earth. The sentence as stated makes one wonder just what the lady meant. We ought surely all to render service to the rest of our fellows, and we ought to get an equivalent service from them in return. What then becomes of the rent we pay for the room we occupy on this earth? By what moral law expounded at the Blackadder Church, of service for service, is the ground landlord permitted to collect it? Here the local clergyman and the Chancellor of the Exchequer might put their heads together and, taking the lady's advice, justify and ensure the collection of the rent of land for the benefit of all the people. Then service for service will not only dominate but sweeten the lives of all.

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The *Catholic Herald* of September 1st gave a whole page to a special interview with Mr R. R. Stokes, M.P., in which he expounded land value taxation and free trade for solving the problem of poverty. Unable to attend the New York Conference, Mr Stokes cabled Mrs Anna George de Mille the following message: "Had Europe grasped the truth of your father's teaching of practical Christianity we should not be in sorry mess we are in to-day. When peace breaks out redoubled efforts must immediately be made to apply it."

## London's Overgrowth and the Causes of Swollen Cities

BY DR. S. VERE PEARSON

"The author made it clear in his earlier book that he had been a student of economics for 30 years . . . and his economics follow the . . . lines of Henry George."

*The Medical Officer*, 15th July, 1939.

"He wants to abolish taxes altogether by dispossessing the landlords and giving the rent to the people who have created it—the community. . . . He thinks this can be done on its own, and not as part of the complete scheme we know as Socialism."

*Daily Herald*, 2nd June, 1939.

"Dr. Pearson looks forward to an era in which speculation in land will be unprofitable, coercion unnecessary, decentralisation will come of its own accord, and such measures as rearmament unnecessary in a world without envy or the fear of poverty."

*New Statesman*, 3rd May, 1939.

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