

SPAIN

Causes of the Civil War

A SPANISH CORRESPONDENT writes :—

Many people believed at the beginning of the war in Spain that it would be of short duration. However, the war continues and it is difficult to foresee how long it will last. To-day the world is beginning to understand that the reasons for this cruel struggle must be very deep-seated.

At the beginning of the Republican régime those who were well informed knew that sooner or later the tragedy would burst forth. Ever since the distant days of the Catholic Kings, when the Moors and the Jews were expelled from Spain, the nation has followed a downward path. That famous queen who helped the Genoese navigator who discovered America was the origin of the decadence of Spain. In order to pay the nobles for the help lent to her in men and money for the conquest of Granada the Catholic queen took the land from the people and delivered it to the lordship of the nobles. Andalusia, a prosperous region, was in fifty years reduced to poverty—on the one side great landed proprietors, on the other a people in moral and material destitution. On her death-bed the queen realized the great injury which had been done, and in her famous last will and testament she begged and prayed that the ownership of the land should be restored to the communes or municipalities. This last wish was not complied with. "It is easy to find the way into hell, but not to come out again."

During the reign of her daughter Juana, Cardinal Cisneros opposed the alienation of more lands to the nobles with their insatiable appetites. The struggle was terrible but the Cardinal was able to maintain it until the succession of Charles V, grandson of the Catholic queen, who devoted himself to satisfying the insatiable appetite of the nobles and took away the communal lands of Castille and Estremadura, delivering these two regions to poverty as his grandmother had done with Andalusia.

This Charles V, born in Germany, was a terrible scourge to Spain. Her treasury was despoiled to carry on continuous wars and her commerce was ruined. Never before were so many monopolies and privileges created. The decadence continued under the following kings. The people lived like slaves, and Spain fell into the greatest poverty.

Some forty years ago there began in Spain a struggle to remedy this great poverty by restoring to the people the lands that had formerly been theirs, but all these efforts were unsuccessful. The governments were dominated by the nobility. Whenever a law was passed which might have been prejudicial to them they had it annulled.

Some six years ago, at its birth, the Republic introduced the law for Agrarian Reform which gave land to the people, and within a few days there broke out the military rising of Sanjurjo, a general in the service of the dukes and the great landed proprietors. This rising was broken. Its object was to destroy the Agrarian Reform law.

With the Republic the nobles remained and continued to exercise their power. The Conservatives won the elections (in 1933) and the first thing they did was to suppress the Agrarian Reform law. When the Left returned to power, within two months they passed the law relating to communal estates, by which the communal properties which had been taken from the people during the nineteenth century would have been restored to them. Within four days of the passing of this law there broke out the new military rising which has made Spain the scene of a great tragedy. The people won legally at the ballot-box. The Government of the Republic is a legitimate Government and ought to win. All over the world an attempt has been made to prejudice the legitimate Government by calling it a Bolshevik Government, but this is untrue. The majority is Republican. To-day it accepts the help of Communists and Socialists, but the Spaniard will never accept tyranny of anyone. The Spaniard loves individual liberty as the most precious of treasures. The Republic is in the right and it has strength behind it as well. It struggles for an ideal. What it strives for is

certain. Republican Spain will have neither serfs nor feudal lords. In Spain we believe in liberty of trading. Our hope is out of this conflict to find a new path which will lead a noble people to the splendid goal which it struggles and offers its life to attain.

UNITED STATES

Herbert Bigelow in Congress

During the consideration in the House of Representatives on 17th June of a Bill to provide increased revenues for the District of Columbia, the seat of the Federal Government, the Rev. Herbert S. Bigelow (Ohio), moved an amendment which would have had the effect of deriving more revenue from land values and correspondingly exempting improvements. In speaking to his amendment Mr Bigelow referred to the fact that the Hon. Tom L. Johnson had moved a similar amendment 43 years before which had received six votes. He referred to the fact that the Australian Government, in laying out Canberra as the seat of its federal government, had made provision to secure that land values should go to the public treasury. He continued :—

This land value of the District of Columbia is, of course, socially created value. It is not, like houses or other things, the product of private industry. This is value which in every city comes in spite of owners, as cream rises to the top of a pan of milk, according to a law of its own. The heirs of the old families who got here first skim the cream. They reap these socially created land values.

Here is a ground-rent income of some \$25,000,000 a year that by right should be going to the Public Treasury. But most of it is allowed to go into private pockets. With the loss of this revenue of its own, the city has to make tax raids on private property. If the city had, year by year, collected this ground rent, in lieu of taxes, it would have kept down the speculative price of land. Those who wanted to use land could have gotten it on more reasonable terms. But, instead of collecting its own ground rent and thus keeping the price of land down, the city has put the \$25,000,000 tax burden on houses and all productive enterprises. This tax burden on houses and other forms of wealth adds to prices. Instead of collecting our own publicly earned income and keeping the price of land down, we tax privately produced wealth, thereby raising the price of land and everything that is produced on land.

Why do we have, as the President asserts, a third of our people ill-clad, ill-housed and ill-fed ?

I think that one of the reasons is our failure to distinguish correctly between private property and public property.

If one man was the first to stake out a claim around some trees in a desert, he was permitted to charge the famished and belated travellers for the water of his private oasis. If a man came upon a coalfield or an oil pocket, he was free to monopolize his findings and to put on all the royalties the traffic would bear. If one's great-grandfather invested the profits of his fur business in lots in a Manhattan village, his heirs were free to collect princely fees from the luckless people who came too late on the scene.

The price of land is due to the pressure of population against the Nation's resources. It is sheer tribute that owners can levy on users. The owners hold the land against a growing population. The more the population grows, the greater the tribute. The land of the Nation is now capitalized at something like one hundred and fifty billions. This is not labour-produced value. This is monopoly value.

We could not cut up the continent into little pieces and give everybody a piece. But everybody who owns a piece of land in city or in country could be required to pay a ground rent proportionate to the location and value of his land.

If this ground rent were collected from all owners of land and then used to pay the expenses of government, it would thus get distributed to all in the benefits of government. This would not be an injustice to the owner, for, if he used

his ground properly, the tax exemptions on his improvements and industry would more than balance his ground rent. The system I propose would penalize the evil of holding land without using it properly, and, in justice to all of us, this should be penalized.

This is one reason why one-third of our people are ill-clad, ill-housed and ill-fed.

On the votes being counted there were—Ayes 21, Noes 64. So the amendment was rejected.

Henry George School

Visitors from Europe to the School Headquarters in New York, 211 West 79th Street, have recently been Mr Ashley Mitchell and Mr C. C. Foot. Both write to *Land & Liberty* with enthusiasm about the progress being made. Mr Foot, in the merchant service, came to New York after the long voyage to Leghorn in Italy and Poti in Georgia (U.S.S.R.), and has been able to compare conditions under Fascist, Communist and Democratic regimes. He was a member of the economic class at 94 Petty France, London. Stimulated by a further re-reading of *Progress and Poverty* as well as by the witness of activity in New York he is preparing to organize and conduct a class of his own.

TRANSVAAL

A cordial welcome is given, with best wishes for continuing success, to the new Journal, *The Free People*, the first issue of which appeared on 1st July. It is the official organ of the Farmers' and Workers' Party. Standing "For Justice: For Freedom: For Democracy," its aim is to promote the economic and social philosophy of Henry George. Editor of the Journal and Secretary of the Party is Mr Mather Smith, Box 4680, Johannesburg and a valued co-worker is Mr F. A. W. Lucas, the Chairman of the Party, to whose pioneer work is largely due the adoption, in 1916, of the measure of the Rating of Land Values which the Towns and Village Councils in the Transvaal now enjoy. Among other interesting and informing matter, the Journal exhorts its readers to join and promote the class-work of the H.G. School of Social Science.

Mr Mather Smith writes under date 8th August: "Thanks for the two copies of the *Teachers' Manual* and two of the *Social Science Manual*. The Craighall (a township just outside the municipal area) School completed the fifth lesson this week and I am starting a School in the centre of Johannesburg on 16th August. Material has been provided for a School to be started also in Brakpan on the East Rand." Mr Smith is pushing the sale of the books in the bookshops and has been supplied with the display cards of the Henry George Foundation as an aid in this enterprise.

DENMARK

The 24th Annual Reunion of the Henry George League and "Summer School" takes place on 4th to 6th September at the Vestbirk Folkschool near Horsens in Jutland, where the members will be in residence. Mr J. L. Björner presides and there will be three sessions each day, the speakers being Dr V. Stareke, Bue Björner, P. C. Pedersen, Johannes Hohlenberg, N. Bredkjaer, Axel Fraenckel, Kr. Kolding, Jens M. Jensen and Jakob E. Lange. A very comprehensive programme is provided.

Grundskyld, the organ of the League, announces two new books: *Danish Agriculture*, a symposium of a number of articles by various authors, two being written by K. J. Kristensen who is editor of the book; and the awaited new book by Jakob E. Lange on Henry George's Life and Work which is being published in the first place in Swedish by Johan Hansson's publishing house in Stockholm. A Danish edition will also be published; but English-speaking admirers of Jakob E. Lange will be impatient to know when an English edition will be available.

ARGENTINA

Dr Felix Vitale writes: "I have had several pamphlets published and have sent copies to leading people in various circles: Bishops, Deputies, Senators, Governors, etc.,

and have had some acknowledgments. In the Argentine I think we are doing something useful. You are acquainted with our Journal *Nueva Argentina* and among our contributors are a number of young enthusiasts—but we are confronted, as everywhere, with the same inconvenience, the lack of funds. Landowners, as you say, have money and traditions; but in trying to make our influence felt we have little money and have to struggle against other handicaps. Send me a number of copies of *Social Problems* and *The Condition of Labour*.

FRANCE

An important note in *Terre et Liberté* (18 Av. de la Criolla, Suresnes, Paris) for April-June, 1937, gives the interesting news that the Finance Committee of the French House of Commons has approved in principle an optional tax on the site value of unbuilt land for parishes possessing a town and country planning scheme (using British idioms). This was approved by the Chamber of Deputies, but was dropped from the order paper of the Senate. On inquiry it is found that a hostile report from the Senate Finance Committee was the reason for this suppression. M Leon Blum has weakly accepted this rebuff to his most high-minded colleague, Henri Sellier, but as long as M Sellier holds the Ministry of Public Health (or any other office) in the Whig-Socialist French Cabinet we are not justified in despairing of France, which sets the speed of advance for the Latin world.—M.J.S.

BRAZIL

M.J.S. writes:—

The Hon. A. M. Asquith painted an alluring picture of the gains of alien land monopolists under the Vargas régime at the annual meeting of Parana Plantations Limited on 23rd July, 1937. A good first dividend was paid, and a rise in population from nil to 22,000—chiefly Swiss and hard-working Central Europeans—was associated with a rise in price of land sold from 20s. per acre in 1935 to 26s. in 1936 and 29s. in 1937. The Syndicate has, he states, over 2½ million acres of such land to sell.

The import of the cheap coffee which will thus be cast upon the Brazilian market can hardly be calculated. It is the only crop which the settlers can grow to pay such a price for wilderness land: the estimate for this year is 300,000 bags. This must entail purchase by the Vargas Government of a further 300,000 bags produced on the highly valued and deeply mortgaged coast belt, for destruction, to keep up the price.

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