

PIONEER REFORMER: J. P. JONES

We record, with regret, the loss to Victoria by the death of Hon. John Percy Jones at an advanced age. He was a Tasmanian, born at Hobart in 1872, and as a boy was thrown upon his own resources.

Tasmania, from its first measure of self-government to present time lies in the grip of land monopoly. Twenty families control the economic life of the State and have their own "Upper" or Superior House of 16 members, which still overrules the Peoples' House of Assembly. Being without influence, the youth had to endure the hardships of being an "outsider" in his native land, and experienced the tough conditions where monopoly is the creed of the government. In later years, he used to speak of these inflictions on young people which, naturally, made him a determined reformer.

Frustrated in Tasmania, young Jones came over in the eighties to Victoria, where tariff taxes, called Protection, had made "Marvellous Melbourne" a paradise for the working man. He got his first job delivering meat for a butcher by pushing a hand truck.

Meets Henry George

In 1890 Henry George came to Melbourne and J. P. Jones, then 18 years, attended the lectures. Meeting Henry George in the street, the young man stopped him to say that he had been at the lecture on the previous night. Henry George must have been impressed by the youthful listener, for J. P. Jones, years afterwards, always recalled with pleasure the kindly and considerate manner in which Henry George conversed with him on that occasion.

At the famous debate in the Exhibition Building on Free Trade v. Protection between Henry George and W. A. Trenwith, one listener was J. P. Jones, and 65 years later he was one of the few survivors of the huge audience. Thus stimulated, his early interest in political questions never flagged.

Prepares for Reform

To gain the education of which he had been deprived in earlier life, J. P. Jones attended night classes and took a particular interest in economics. He was closely identified with the new Socialist party, the early Labor movement and the "Tocsin" newspaper. In business life he built up a city tailoring business and prospered in that as in other activities. Looking towards Parliament, he saw that the "Upper" House enshrined privilege and maintained monopoly. It was necessary to win seats in the Legislative Council in order to allow the Lower House, or People's Assembly, to give effect to its measures. Hence in 1910 he won election for East Melbourne to the Legislative Council. In the short-lived Elmslie Labor Government of 1913 Hon. J. P. Jones was a Cabinet Minister, and likewise in later Labor ministries between 1927 and 1935.

Rating on Land Values

One of the measures promoted in the People's Assembly but thrown out by the Privilege Council was the reform of local municipal government act to permit such municipalities desiring to do so to exempt all buildings from rates and make long frontages and

vacant blocks pay a fair share of local rates. For years the Privilege Council had shielded these monopoly interests. Before 1920 Hon. E. L. Kiernan had battled his way into the Legislative Council to promote this much needed reform. He found that Hon. J. P. Jones was a staunch colleague and was of great assistance in securing the passage through the Legislative Council of his measure to establish the modern municipal system of Rating on Land Values in Victoria.

Held His Course

During the depression of 1930-31 the Hon. J. P. Jones was prominently identified with the all-party "Premiers' Plan." During the political upset of 1932 he was excluded from the Labor Party for adhering to the Plan, and continued as an Independent.

His death at the age of 83, writes Mr. Kiernan, "removes from Life's stage an outstanding political figure, an able colleague and a dear friend."