

Proudhon Was Right!

VIGGO STARCKE

The article by W. J. Cadman in the April/May issue *Proudhon Was Wrong*, is taken up by Dr. Viggo Starcke of Denmark.

PIERRE JOSEPH PROUDHON was a great man, well worth studying. His biographer, Professor A. Berthod, says that he is the inheritor of the Physiocrats and the precursor of Henry George. He is often considered a socialist or a communist, which he was not. He detested both Marxism and communism and frankly declared: "The impossibility of remedying the injustices of the communist system, the violence it exercises on sympathies and antipathies, the iron yoke with which it fetters the will, the moral torture in which it keeps conscience, the inertia into which it sinks society, and to put it in one word, the bestial and stupid uniformity by which it ties free, active, critical rebellious human nature, has violated ordinary common sense and irrevocably condemned communism."

Proudhon's admirer, Bakunin, said about Karl Marx: "Never was there any confidence between us. Our dispositions were too different. He called me a sentimental idealist, and he was right. I called him a perfidious, vicious and conceited man, and I was right too."

The common misunderstanding of Proudhon derives from his famous saying: "La propriété, c'est le vol!" which must be translated as "Property is robbery," not as "All property is robbery."

In his book, *Laws of Social Evolution*, Professor C. N. Starcke says: "The property that Proudhon calls theft is the power that man, under the protection of the law, has acquired of procuring an income without having to work for it, of seizing land and demanding rent from the holders, and of extorting heavy interest on loans."

From the very first Proudhon regarded land as the great natural basis of human existence, imperishable, and necessary to all human activity, and he asks with what right some men seize this earth which Nature has given to all. He said: "The ground-rent must suffice to supersede the taxes that are now levied by the state without her having any thought of how she appropriates to herself the citizen's wages, which is his blood, his life."

Proudhon did not agree with Karl Marx that "capitalism" in the shape of machines and factories caused exploitation and monetary confusion. But, as long as it is possible for one man to exploit another, exploitation and a state of mutual war will go on. This power of exploitation is rooted in the power of land. It is the stronghold of all capitalism.

Proudhon did not believe in the so-called welfare state. He said: "The most important means which the authorities use to keep the people content is charity; this is the

strongest chain with which they tie the proletariat."

Karl Marx believed in power, sovereignty and organization, Proudhon believed in liberty and justice. He said: "Order and justice are the daughters of liberty." He believed in free men's free organisations: "The strongest groups in the world are those that consist of free, intelligent men who combine in a free contract."

As will be seen, in many ways Proudhon was right. He is well worth studying, and if his French language is an obstacle, I can recommend my late father's book, *Laws of Social Evolution* (1932), in which there is an instructive chapter on Proudhon (pp. 98-135), Viscount Snowden wrote about this book: "I would like to express my admiration for this work. It is the most instructive treatise I have read about this subject."

Proudhon was not wrong. He was the inheritor of the Physiocrats and the precursor of Henry George.

Mr. Cadman writes:

My acquaintance with Proudhon's ideas, is, I must admit, very sketchy, but from what knowledge I did manage to get from the local library it appears Proudhon has been classed as an anarchist as well as a socialist. It was, however, Proudhon's assertion that "Property is Theft" that I was asked to oppose at the Enfield debate (see *LAND & LIBERTY*, April-May) and my chief purpose (naturally!) was to make plain to the audience what is the rightful basis of property. Many of the members present were probably small property-owners and I was not surprised when, upon the vote being taken, ten voted for the motion and ten voted against, whilst many abstained.

ANTI-COMMON MARKET PETITION

WHILE enthusiasm for joining the Common Market has been waning among many people over the last year or so there has been growing support from others for a definite stand against it. Last month, with the support of Members of Parliament from the main political parties, trade unionists and economists, a nation-wide anti-Common Market petition was launched. The petition starts with almost 100,000 signatures, gathered during the last six months, and calls for immediate withdrawal of Britain's application to join.

The petition will eventually be presented to the Queen through a Cabinet Minister.

At the launching of the petition, Mr. Douglas Jay, a former President of the Board of Trade, said that because the main political parties remained nominally supporters of the application to join the E.E.C., public opinion could not easily express itself by normal methods.

The petition council comprises seventy-three members, including twenty-four M.P.s.—thirteen Conservatives, ten Labour and one Liberal—fifteen university dons, eleven of whom are economists, fifteen well-known businessmen, and three trade union officials. The chairman is Sir Arthur Bryant.

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