

# THE SINGLE TAX REVIEW

A Record of the Progress of Single Tax and Tax Reform  
Throughout the World.

---

## THE DANISH PEASANTS' PROGRAMME.

From an article by MR. S. BETHELSEN in the Danish Single Tax Monthly, "RET".

*(Translated for the Single Tax Review by C. W. Sorensen.)*

At last the whole of the organised peasantry of Denmark have nailed to the mast the following proud and uncompromising motto; Equal rights for all, the taxation of land values, complete free-trade, and special privilege for none. To have framed and carried the adoption of such a programme is in itself a great achievement. Its unfaltering assertion spells the establishment of economic freedom in Denmark within a few years—and with that, the recognition by the whole world of Denmark's leadership in social culture and the science of sound government.

It is but ten short years since Karl Hansen-Ankerstraede started the first peasants' Union with definite political aims, at Herfolge, near Koge. Previous to this such social activities as the peasants had manifested had been in the nature of agricultural or purely social or philanthropic endeavor. Possibly too, there had been a background of class feeling. But with the earliest years of the new century a movement began on the islands animated by the teaching of Henry George, and shedding all class-egoism, became truly a People's Cause. The question of equality of opportunity, the Rights of the People in the land, the abolition of privilege in any shape or form was proclaimed at meetings here and there all over Zealand. Then at a conference of the unions held at Koge in November, 1902, these ideas were crystalised into form and a programme adopted which has since drawn to its support the best men among the peasantry and gradually won the united and enthusiastic adherence of district after district.

The first victory gained for this policy of the peasantry was at a meeting of the left wing of the Liberal party held in 1905, when the taxation of land values was for the first time included in its programme, a step that would never have been taken had it not been for the Resolution adopted by the Peasants Union at Koge. A year later a land value tax was formally acknowledged by the leaders of the radical party in their manifesto. But in 1909 the attitude of the party towards the taxation of land values was made so clear and the people became so

insistent, that the competing group of Liberal Reformers issued a programme which included this reform and declared that it meant business. About the same time the Social democratic party privately associated itself with the proposal, and promised its support in Parliament.

The question, however, was not yet understood by the whole of the organized unions of peasants. In Jutland particularly there was some opposition in districts where socialism was prevalent, but in November 1909 at a conference of delegates from all the Jutland unions, unanimity was obtained for a motion placing the taxation of land values at the top of their programme. And finally this victory was emphasised in a manifesto unanimously adopted at the first conference of all the peasants' unions in Denmark, held at Odense on March 18th and 19th of this year, a conference destined to bear far reaching political effects.

This important manifesto declares, amongst other things, that the right of the people to the land must be secured and extended. As the value of the land, both in town and country, is due to the presence and activity of the community as a whole, the end sought should be the appropriation of these socially created values for public purposes by means of a tax on land values. Pending this consummation, the taxation, on a strongly graduated scale, of property and income should be continued.

"To further aid the working classes to gain access to land, the state ought, without loss to the public purse, to make advances on as large a scale as possible to societies of small holders, allotment associations, building societies and the like.

"The holdings to be freehold, but subject to the taxation of the full ground value for the State.

"Revenue duties to be reduced gradually until totally abolished. Protective duties to be abolished systematically and gradually. In the case of undertakings which are in the nature of or by law monopolies, the interests of the community is to be safeguarded, and if necessary, such undertakings to be taken over by the State or local authority."

These quotations indicate the economic insight and clear thinking of the peasantry, who have thus set before themselves a goal which will serve the whole people, and in so doing have quietly assumed the lead in popular economic forward movements.

The right of the people to the land of their native country and the public ownership of land values is with good reason placed as the foundation of the desired reforms. The old-fashioned liberal demand for the introduction of a new Property and Income Tax, which also has been put forward by the socialists, is entirely dropped, the Manifesto expressly referring to the *continuance* of the *existing* taxes of this nature, and that only during the transition period. This is in accord with the sentence which declares that it will only be obligatory on public authorities to take over monopolies where "necessary," that is, when the public interests can be safeguarded in no other way.

Especially important and decisive is the express determination of the peasants

that when loans are made to small holders or to building societies, such are to involve no loss to the community; for this implies a refusal of state subsidies even in the shape of unduly low interest, or any other form of state aid which indirectly causes loss to the community through the artificial inflation of land values. This is emphasized in another passage of the manifesto which calls for the cessation of state help under the "Domestic Animals Act," or at any rate that such shall not operate longer as a benefit affecting only one class in the community. Here we have a most striking example of the independence of spirit which animates the peasantry in an age which in so many ways looks to the state for help.

Like the true free-traders they are, the peasants declare straight out for the ultimate total abolition of all customs duties whether for revenue or protection. Not a single vestige of the wretched system of customs tariffs will remain when the peasant proprietors of Denmark get their own way, yet like sensible men they admit that this desirable end must be achieved gradually and systematically.

With all our heart we congratulate our country on possessing a peasantry capable of forming, asserting and adhering to a politico-economic programme such as the above, a programme of simple but basically sound propositions. In no other country can be found such a class of enlightened agriculturists, demanding no privilege or favour, but merely justice—not for its own members alone, but for the whole people. No political party in the world has come forward with cleaner hands, a more honest purpose, radical and far-reaching in scope, yet gradual and in the best sense conservative in its methods. Wherever political and economic freedom are known and prized, it will be recognised that the plain Danish peasants have formulated a programme that will mark a new era in popular government.

The next step will be to demand from the new parliament the substitution of a land tax for some of the existing forms of taxation, especially the (house) property tax, certain of the more oppressive customs duties, taxes upon industry, and personal taxes. A tax of at least one half per cent. on the unimproved value of all land would be a suitable beginning, moderate in amount, yet sufficient to demonstrate to the whole world the social advantages of such taxation, and its beneficial effects both on the price of land and the wages of labor.

It is expected that the Radical Left will, at its approaching conference, adopt the peasants' manifesto and thus attach this numerous body still more firmly to itself. The other groups of the Liberal party will probably also announce their support of the principle before the general election. The omission to do so might readily lead to misunderstanding as to the real attitude of the groups to their own detriment at the polls.

The first great national conference of the Danish Peasants' Unions has thus set up a new landmark in Danish political fields. It has declared for the taxation of land values, and it will see that it gets it.