

THE SPIRITUAL, MENTAL AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUND FOR THE HENRY GEORGE MOVEMENT IN DENMARK

ADDRESS BY MRS. SIGNE BJØRNER

(At the Oxford International Conference on 15th August)



MRS. SIGNE BJØRNER

This question is often put to us: Why is it that in Denmark, especially the agricultural people, the peasant proprietors and the smallholders, seem to have embraced the cause for freeing the land and it is not so elsewhere? That will have to be explained by sketching the background of the life of the people.

One of our American friends, introducing a Henry George speaker to a very conservative audience, members of the Board of Trade in his town, said: "I have heard murmurs of 'Socialism' concerning our guest. That is absurd. State Socialism is a pessimistic proposition, sprung from a sense of dependency and despondency; Georgeism is an optimistic point of view, born of freedom and fostered by faith in the potency of liberty to solve all the problems of social relations." These words are an explanation of the position of our people as a whole. With us, Georgeism, or, as some of its adherents prefer to term it, *The State of Justice and Equity* (Retsstaten), is more than a point of view, it is an attitude of mind, a state of the spirit.

Owing to certain reforms in the beginning of last century, the farmers were liberated from the bondage in which they had stood to the large estates. From being tenant serfs, they got the freedom to settle where they wished; gradually they became freeholders. This freedom inaugurated an enormous progress. That is a matter of history, and the development of Danish agriculture to what it is to-day—something we are rather proud of—dates from that reform.

To the mental and economic progress among our peasants during this last century—for with the better economic conditions came better education, agricultural High Schools and Colleges—was added the *spiritual* development through the Danish Peoples' High Schools. These were originated by a band of enthusiastic university men, after the precepts and ideals of our great educational philosophers, Kold and Grundtvig.

This educational movement, started and carried on without official help or meddling, has been greatly developed

so that now there are more than a hundred High Schools in our small country. Nearly all young people of both sexes, from the ages of 20 to 25 or so, from the homes of farmers or smallholders, and a growing number from the cities, take a term or two at these schools, in summer three months, in winter five. They come of their own accord to the school of their choice, paying for it themselves; live at the school, which is of course conducted on a plain and simple basis, quite cheaply; attend lectures from their principal and teachers; and work on the subjects which especially interest them, with books and in classes. Since there are practically no illiterates of adult age in Denmark, the object of the High School is not so much to add to the pupil's knowledge of "the three R's"—though such instruction can also be had. The main object is to give a perspective of life and the laws of life, by means of studying our country's and the world's history, biology and the physical sciences; and also, though never by any manner of theological cramming, to bring the young people in touch with eternal life and give them occasion to glimpse at the laws which govern the life of the soul.

The aim of the High School is to open the doors and windows of mind and spirit, so that the pupils may find whatever help there is to be had, and be able to go into the world and work out their own salvation, each in his own way. Needless to say, many of our High School teachers are connected with the Henry George movement, foremost among them Mr. Jacob E. Lange, who was to have spoken here.

This, I believe, is an especially Danish institution, and perhaps accountable for the spiritual background of Georgeism, which is this: The lasting life of the soul is only carried through this world in the lives of individuals. The idea of individuals being subservient to the state ("We belong to the state") is therefore misleading. This organization is only valuable to us inasmuch as it gives security of individual freedom, only to be achieved through equal justice to all. Liberty is the first demand of the spirit, since each soul must work out its own problems without uncalled for interference, in order to reach its fullest development. Such liberty can only be had in a state of justice and equity. In the knowledge of this spiritual state of our people—you might call it religious, only we don't speak in religious terms—lies our great hope.

This hope is furthermore strengthened by the mental attitude, which is *co-operative*. In this respect we owe a debt to Great Britain, which can never be overrated. The great influence came to us through the example of the poor and hard-suffering Rochdale weavers, who showed the world an object lesson in co-operation, one of the greatest on earth, if we but learn it thoroughly and carry it out right.

The first co-operative stores in Denmark were founded by a small group of labourers, just as badly-off as the Rochdale men, instructed and led by the minister of their church, whose compassion for them was only equalled by his determination to help as he could. It was built on the same pure and equitable principles tried out by these Rochdale men, and through all later developments these principles of equality and democracy have been the leading light. There are now consumers' leagues all over the country, a store in every village and a number in the larger towns, united in a wholesale union with many branches and factories, handling the larger part of all the commodities used in the country.

But the co-operation of our *agricultural producers* has been a still greater influence toward bringing the people to our point of view, ripening them for the co-operative commonwealth, making them self-reliant, opposed to any kind of paternalistic socialization. For why should they wish for state officials to do things for them, which they can do for themselves? It has also made plain the economic necessity for freeing the land from monopoly,

sharpened by the great rise in values, now privately collected.

The co-operative dairies, bacon factories, egg packeries, etc., have made smallholdings profitable and therefore created a growing demand for dividing up the land. Under the old system of separate churning, cheese making, etc., the small farmer could never compete with the large estates, which could afford better facilities and skilled workers and were sure of their markets, while the little farmer had to barter with an astute town merchant, whose business it was to give as little as possible for the product.

Now, when the milk from each farm is sent—rather called for—straight to the dairy each day, in separate and individual cans, the contents of which are tested by experts and paid for according to quality, the milk from the one-or-two-cow place is as good as, they say often better than, that from the larger farms. At any rate, the land of the small farms, being worked intensively and by the smallholder himself and his family, yields comparatively more than the larger farms or estates and of course, in the political wisdom of our day, is taxed—financed—accordingly. The proportion of taxes payable by the smallholder is as five to three payable by the larger farmers, and five to one payable by the large estates, for the same unit of land values, the difference being tax on improvements, tariff taxes and income taxes.

The injustice of this is plain to everyone, not least to those who suffer directly for it, and under the new land subdivision laws their number is growing. Be it said to the honour of our small farmers: they have never once asked for reductions or exemptions for themselves. But at the initiative of intelligent leaders from their own rank and file and instructed by such able Georgeist leaders as Mr. S. Berthelsen and Mr. Jacob E. Lange, the smallholders have for years been constantly demanding an equal and equitable system of sharing the expense of the community, that is, by abolition of taxes and the replacing of them by Jordskyld or Grundskyld, *dues paid on land value only*. We do not call the land-value contribution a "tax," nor is it.

All these things explain the position of the small peasant proprietor. And there is still another. Some might think that, with land values continually rising, even the small farmer would be tempted to let his personal interest in holding on to his share of the increment get the better of his natural instinct for justice. But he looks farther ahead. There is a strong family instinct, as strong as with any scion of a noble estate, with our farming people, and especially among those where the work of husband, wife and children go to build up the home. All share the labour and the fruits of it, and the main consideration is not to grab something for yourself, at the end of a strenuous life, something which you haven't earned, but which you think you may be entitled to, because you have had to deliver so much of your own earnings to others, with no returns. This position might be explained, even condoned. But our farmers know, that while they might get an old age pension by selling their land for so much more than they paid for it, that would mean that each of their children, when setting out to get land on which to build their home, would have to pay just as much more for admission to labour and permission to build. For the family, that would mean a much larger loss, the necessity for still larger loans with the credit societies (also co-operative) than they had been engaged in paying interest for all their lives; and for the children and their families, even less returns for their labour. Hence, for spiritual, moral and practical reasons, the clear and emphatic demand for justice, nothing but justice. This is the very strong and growing political influence backing our demand—the influence of our smallholders and the small farming classes.

Then too, the politico-economic development seems to

aid. There has been a strong tendency among politicians of all parties toward State Socialism, or at least toward socialization. Not that they all subscribe to the idea, that would not be consistent with the point of view of their constituents. They do not espouse the paternalistic ideal openly, but it seems to have been the easiest way when the class of voters on which each had to rely for re-election, put up a distress signal, to barter with colleagues in Parliament—who may be in a position to need help another time—and secure a subsidy of some sort for the distressed, "passing the buck," as an American phrase puts it, to the taxpayer. And with subsidy comes State control, a new set of officials, the chance to supply political supporters with jobs. But there seems to be a limit to even this source of political power.

The *Tax Bolshevism*, as George Brandes calls it, in our country, has reached such heights that it is crippling industry, thus diminishing the possibilities for filling the ever hungry Exchequer and defeating its own aims. More than any other form of graft devised by collaboration of politics and high finance, this blending of public and private interests is proving to the people that the more we all mind our own affairs and the less we leave for politicians to mind for us, the better.

I am not casting a slur on our public men; they are as good and honest as any, always much better than the system under which they have to work, by which they are often compelled to help on developments they never intended. But a distinction must be made. The man who sees the bottom problem, that of freeing the land by requiring *dues* paid by every holder, in proportion to value received, and freeing industry by abolishing taxes, and who goes after results according to his convictions, is a statesman. Any other could be nothing but a politician, not entitled to public respect or consideration.

This drift of politics toward bureaucracy or paternalism, also called State Socialism, is responsible for the birth and growth of a new opposition party in which Georgeists take a leading part. The platform is: Abolition of all rights of taxation of incurring public debts and of all meddling in private affairs and business by the State.

Abolition of Land Monopoly by public collection of the whole rent of the land, only so much of it to be officially used as is required for absolutely public purposes, such as administering free and equal justice, the rest to be credited equally to all members of the community, so that each may use it to pay for his own upbringing, schooling, eventually for old age pension for himself, whatever the requirement may be.

In this proposal of diminishing the functions of the State and dividing the rent of land values there is the great perspective of freedom—for children and mothers, and through them for fathers, and it seems to be the only practical foundation for the ideal of the natural adjustment of functions; the State, upholder of justice, on the principle of *Equality*; Business, organized or spontaneous co-operation and division of labour, on the principle of *Brotherhood*; and spiritual development on individual lines, made possible by *Freedom*.

The new party also demands *Direct Government by the People*, and proposes a method propounded by a Dane (a lawyer named Johan Peterson) to make it possible by "joint-government," or "co-operative government." It has all the advantages of modern reforms such as primaries, referendum, initiative and recall, but is very direct and as simple as our land-freeing proposition. Needless to say, the party itself is constituted on its own plan, which precludes the danger of corruption that has swerved so many parties from their original platforms.

The policy of the new party seems a very clear and radical one, in the real sense of the word, going to the root of the evil. Of course there has been and is still some dissension amongst us as to the expediency of using

strength for building up a new party, but there is not and never was any difference of opinion on principle; only on matters of tactics, perhaps of temperament.

Those who are building the new party claim that they do not want to change the ways or minds of those who have a place and a work to do in the old parties. The ideas of Henry George should be the leaven everywhere; so let them stay and do the good work where they belong.

There are plenty who are dissatisfied with all the existing parties and a growing number who never use their vote, because they see no sense in supporting any of the parties, which all turn out the same works, however different their platforms. There are also the new voters, the women and the young men, who have no loyalty bonds to break, but can place their vote where their affections are. These will be sufficient to build up the new party. If it succeeds, well and good, our work is done. It is in itself the nucleus of "The State of Justice and Equity," which is its name (Retsstatspartiet). All it needs for its realization, to go into operation as a party, is sufficient support from the people. And even if it only develops slowly, as it may, for even with us there is some conservatism in the popular mind, it will stand as a menace to other parties which fail to satisfy that ever active and always demanding contingency, the "Single Taxers." Even should it fail, which we consider impossible, conditions will be none the worse for having had it. The old parties will be as ready as now to do our work, if we have the strength to overcome the open or hidden resistance in the way, to break their deplorable alliances and overcome the drawbacks in their systems. For one thing is certain: though parties may come and go, the spirit of justice, the need of conforming to eternal laws will stay with us for ever. With us will stay and grow the economic necessity for equal opportunity and the state of mind which prefers self-reliant liberty to the eventual fleshpots of state servitude. And the name of Henry George will be quoted wherever men meet to discuss ways and means of adjusting their conditions to these laws.

MR. MUNGO FAIRLEY, Glasgow: What has been achieved in other lands, the description of methods of valuation and the machinery for levying land value taxes, with the concrete results following thereon, have inspired the members no less than they have informed them. As one of the happy band residing in Ruskin College, I enjoyed to the full the informing discussion that took place nightly in the rooms after the close of the day's work. These discussions, apart from the information collected at the moment, have started friendships among men living in various countries which will be of considerable future value to the movement. I hope you will be able to take full advantage of the very fine publicity the movement has got through the Conference.

ANDREW SCOTT

We regret to announce the death of Andrew Scott, of Southport. He was an adherent of the Taxation of Land Values of about twenty years' standing and a loyal supporter of LAND & LIBERTY. He has passed away at 44 years of age after a brief illness following blood-poisoning in the foot. He was one of the original members of the Liverpool League, and for more than twelve years had been resident in Southport. He was exceedingly well liked and highly respected both in business and home circles and was always doing something to advance our movement among his associates. We extend our deep sympathy to his widow and his two boys in their bereavement and their sorrow in the loss of a beloved companion.

INTERNATIONAL ASPECT OF LAND-VALUE POLICY

Address by James Dundas White, LL.D.

(At the Oxford International Conference on 14th August)

Our general position is that in every country the land which Nature has provided should be treated as the property of the people, that its rent should be their common revenue, and that there should be no taxes on improvements, or on production or on exchange, whether internal or international. The further this policy is developed in various countries, the more closely shall we approach the larger ideal of regarding the earth as the heritage of the children of men, and its rent as their common revenue; of giving free scope to industry, production and exchange throughout the world; and of considering political frontiers as national administrative boundaries, to be maintained and re-adjusted by mutual consent as the special circumstances may require. This policy is so simple that a child can understand it; and is so far-reaching that it would lay the economic foundations for human well-being and human brotherhood throughout the world.

In practice, of course, each nation has to legislate for its own territory, and we may therefore consider how the international advantages may be promoted by action on a national basis. In this country, for instance, the immediate objective is to reform the present system of taxing and rating landed properties by taxing and rating those who hold the land according to the true market value of the land that they hold, whether they are using it or not, and by untaxing and unrating houses and all other improvements. To do so would burst land monopoly, would make the land available for use on fair terms, and would give free scope to its development. In all these ways it would promote production, open up new opportunities of livelihood, remove important causes of poverty and unrest, and promote prosperity and contentment here. In any other country, also, the application of the same policy would produce similar results. These results, moreover, have an important international bearing, because discontented people are dangerous neighbours, and unrest at home is apt to find expression in animosity abroad; while the spread of prosperity and contentment in each country would itself promote international friendship and good-will.

The policy, moreover, would have further advantages, because, as a further development in any country, the securing of the rights of the people to the land and its rent, would be accompanied and followed not only by the removal of the taxes on production, but also by the repeal of the taxes on both its internal and its external trade. In so far as the various nations proceed along these lines, the citizens of the one nation would be enabled to trade freely with those of the other nation, and free course would be given to those processes which enable the inhabitants of each country to participate in the natural advantages of any other country, and which bind the peoples together for their mutual benefit. This Free Trade goes far beyond mere anti-protectionism. It sees that protective taxes on trade generally produce a certain amount of revenue, and that revenue-taxes on trade generally have a protective effect. It recognizes that some of the taxes on trade may be worse than others; but it is opposed to them all, because by checking the course of trade they all tend to impoverishment, and they all operate to hinder the working of those processes that would bind the nations together. The mere anti-protectionist has to acquiesce in the taxation of trade for revenue, because he has no alternative plan; but the real Free Trader has an alternative plan, and knows that in any country the treatment of the land rent as public revenue is the necessary finance of real Free Trade.