

A NEW MOVEMENT IN BELGIUM ?

[Mr. Fredk. Verinder writes : The following is a translation of an article by a Belgian "Georgist" from whom I have lately received many interesting letters. I hope its publication may bring him the help for which he asks. Replies should be addressed to Monsieur Albert Cauwel, 55, rue de Pavie, Brussels.]

"I have followed for a long time, with a lively and increasing interest, the efforts of the 'Leagues for the Taxation of Land Values' to secure the triumph of the ideas of Henry George, not only in England, but also in the whole world. I am unfortunately obliged to confess that Belgium, my native land, has so far remained quite indifferent towards this fine movement in favour of the application of a social reform in comparison with which all other reforms are only palliatives—'remedies' of an ephemeral and illusory efficacy.

"If you ask me to tell you the causes of such regrettable apathy, I should reply that they lie, in the first place, in the fact that very few persons have read and studied PROGRESS AND POVERTY, or THE CONDITION OF LABOUR, the only works of Henry George of which French translations exist. His other works are entirely unknown here, even to people who wish to be considered as intellectuals, sociologists or scholars.

"It is necessary to state, in the second place, that the French editions of the two works, which I have just mentioned, have been, for many years, entirely out of print, so that those who desire to study the ideas of Henry George find it impossible to procure copies of them; very few libraries accessible to the public have any copies. It is, therefore, not astonishing that, under these conditions, my compatriots are ignorant of all that concerns the Single Tax, or the Land Question in general. Under the circumstances, their ignorance is excusable.

"There is, in the third place, another cause which hinders the diffusion of Henry George's ideas. The notion of individual or private property in land is so rooted in the mind of every individual that nobody succeeds in understanding that he could have the means to live in a social organization based upon common property in land. Roman law has pushed its roots so deeply into their minds, laws and customs, that he who seeks to win acceptance for theories which are opposed to it finds himself up against an invincible resistance, even on the part of those who should be in sympathy with the principle.

"I add, finally, a fourth reason, though less important than the preceding. If the partizans of the common ownership of land do almost nothing, here in Belgium, to propagate their ideas, the defenders of private property in land, on the contrary, lose no opportunity of defending energetically their privileged position. Fearing, for instance, that the ideas of Henry George might penetrate into Belgium and mislead the open-minded, the extreme Conservatives have been first in the field. It is for the purpose of thwarting the diffusion of these ideas, that Father Valère Fallon, S.J., has published a book, intended to refute the whole Georgist system. This book, LES PLUS-VALUES ET L'IMPÔT, appeared some months before the War, and it is partly due to this circumstance, that it has not been more heard of. It is, moreover, very well written, and contains a first-class 'documentation.'

"These are the principal causes which, in my opinion, have contributed to hinder the propagation of the Georgist thesis.

"To remedy such a state of things, it is necessary just simply to imitate what you are doing. But it is necessary to begin by publishing in French cheap editions of the principal works of H. George, and to circulate them in very large numbers among the public, and in all intellectual

circles, and wherever there is interest in the Land Question, from whatever point of view. There are English and German editions of PROGRESS AND POVERTY, which are not dear. Why should we not have them in French? France and Belgium are in a position to absorb some thousands of copies. For let us not forget that the position in France is the same as here.

"It is evident that publications need not be limited to the writings of Henry George. It will be necessary to found a League like those that exist among you. It will be necessary to publish a periodical; to distribute pamphlets and tracts; to hold lectures and conferences, etc., etc. Important personalities, in their spheres of influence, will have to cry up the practical application of the Single Tax! A vast field is open to the activity of the spirits which aspire to ameliorate social conditions in every nation of the globe.

"I express the hope that your people will interest themselves in the efforts undertaken by persons who are to-day isolated, and that they will not grudge the material and moral help of which we are in need, and which they can give us the more easily because among you the movement is very well organized, and is functioning admirably, as is proved by the magnificent International Congress at Oxford last month.

"If we are not able to follow the course which I have very briefly sketched out, it is to be feared that Belgium, like France, will always remain hostile to the remedy advocated by Henry George.

"ALBERT CAUWEL.

"September 15th, 1923."

The general constructive policy of the Labour Party on the methods of financing the municipal services may be briefly stated as follows:—

(A) The rating of land values, with power to public authorities to purchase at a sum not exceeding the capitalized annual rateable value.

—Herbert Morrison, L.C.C., in THE NEW LEADER, 19th October, 1923.

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In addition to this, the whole system of municipal finances requires to be overhauled. Steps must be taken to remove existing anomalies and relate rates to the ability to pay. Inequalities in assessment must be removed; rich areas must help to bear the burdens of the poor areas; land must be assessed at its selling value; unoccupied property must be fully rated; rates must be levied on ground values; and there must be a uniform system of valuation.—National Council of the Independent Labour Party in a statement printed in THE NEW LEADER, 19th October, 1923.

SPAIN

The October issue of EL IMPUESTO UNICO, the organ of the Spanish League, devotes most of its space to the Oxford International Conference. Besides giving a condensed summary of the week's proceedings, the editor, Señor Antonio Albendin, gives the full text of the paper he read at the Conference on "The Georgist Movement in Spain and South America," and prints Spanish translations of the "Declaration of Principles" and of the "Manifesto to all Governments," adopted by the Conference, and also of Mr. Arthur Henderson's long message to the Conference. The censorship set up by the new Government of Spain is mentioned as one of the causes of the late appearance of the October issue.

F. V.