



# The Passing of a French Georgeist Leader — A. Daudé-Bancel

BY FRANK DUPUIS

The story of the Georgeist movement in France from its earliest days up to the death of its greatest personality.

**DAUDE BANCEL** was born in 1870, in Languedoc, in southern France, his family having some connection with that of the novelist, Alphonse Daudet. Up to the age of thirty Daudé Bancel suffered such bad health that the doctors despaired of his life. Yet, by abstemiousness, simplicity of living, and regular exercise he survived to devote himself almost up to his last hour to the cause of justice and humanity, as he saw it, with an unflagging energy that could not have been surpassed.

After attending the University of Montpellier (the only school where John Stuart Mill ever studied) Daudé Bancel obtained a degree in pharmacy and established his own business. But an early interest in literature had already drawn him to journalism, and his insatiable quest for knowledge led him to explore the various socialistic and even anarchist ideas then current, including the land nationalisation proposals of the Swiss economist Léon Walras. Languedoc, with its tradition of free thought, appears to have been a centre of controversy. At this period Charles Gide, uncle of the novelist André Gide, was professor of law at Montpellier, and he had already become widely known — later to be universally recognised — as a writer on economic subjects, notable for the clarity and attractiveness of his style. Young Daudé Bancel made his acquaintance, and despite difference of age became his affectionate friend. Gide had been inspired by the works of Bastiat and he recognised the validity of Henry George's doctrine, though not perhaps its full significance.

He had none of the gifts of an agitator, and perhaps his pessimistic temperament made him despair of any radical change in the law. Possibly this promoted his belief in the Co-operative movement, which does not require legislation, as the best hope of circumventing the obstinate spirit of monopoly. The Co-operative movement in France has never been, as is its counterpart in Great Britain, rigidly linked either to a political party or to a specific socialist doctrine. Its literature expresses an idealism that one misses in its British counterpart. If British Co-operators turned their attention to land reform they might revive this essential element.

At the turn of the century, however, Co-operative Societies in France were in such difficulties that no suitable person could be induced to act as general secretary of their Union. On Gide's suggestion Daudé Bancel undertook the thankless task, first selling his business and devoting his own funds to the cause. Leaders of the

movement have since acknowledged how much its subsequent progress owes to his efforts at this juncture and in the following years.

But Daudé Bancel's work as organiser, editor, journalist and speaker was not, even during those strenuous years, confined to Co-operation. He supported other causes, none of the popular kind that attracted the effusive emotionalist, but rather the unpopular appeals directed to integrity of mind and body. It was in 1925 that his active interest in land-value taxation began. In 1924 Sam Meyer, a prosperous Belgian retailer, had formed a group in Brussels, and established a journal, *La Terre*, devoted to land-value taxation. When the original editor, Albert Cauwell, died in the following year, Sam Meyer, then living in Paris, applied to Charles Gide, at that time Professor of Political Economy at the Collège de France, to recommend a replacement. Gide suggested that Daudé Bancel, although rather inclined to the views of Walras, might easily be brought to see the merits of the Georgeist method which, moreover, coincided with that of the Metric Tax already advocated in France independently of Henry George, by Albert Maximilian Toubeau some forty years before.

Sam Meyer called on Daudé Bancel, and this was the beginning of the collaboration that endured until Meyer's death. The editorial office was transferred to Paris, and in 1928, by arrangement with the French *Ligue du Libre-Echange*, of which Senator James Hennessey was President and Charles Sorel, Secretary, the journal adopted the full Free Trade doctrine and the title became *Terre et Liberté*. Later the French movement affiliated to the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade. Charles Gide died in 1932 but his support had already secured the favourable interest of others at the Sorbonne and his ideas began to make progress in intellectual circles.

The socialist organisations, however, which in 1889 had joined to welcome Henry George on the occasion of the centenary of the Great Revolution, showed less interest. Léon Blum, the socialist political leader, obstinately refused to listen. Economic liberation is not, of course, a principle likely to attract aspirants for political power. Then came the war, the German occupation and enforced cessation of activity. Sam Meyer, "a charming man, a perfect optimist who never suspected evil", *vide* Daudé Bancel, was arrested by the Nazis and disappeared.

But this set-back did not deter Daudé Bancel. After the

war, now on pension from the Co-operative Union, and nearer eighty than seventy, he, in collaboration with M. Max Toubeau and others, revived *Terre et Liberté* as a cyclostyled issue. Scattered supporters were traced, the *Ligue* was reformed, and now the journal appears again as a regular printed quarterly. Moreover, Daudé Bancel's prestige as a journalist, and his extensive acquaintance, enabled him to place his own and fellow Georgeists' articles in other periodicals. Daudé Bancel always remained true to Co-operative ideals, but he saw that they could never be fully realised without land reform.

So fate overtook this indomitable man in his ninety-third year, almost as active as ever; and his last article, written only a few days before his death, appears in the number of *Terre et Liberté* consecrated to his memory. In this article, which is a review of a study of the spirit of revolution, he emphasises the eternal futility of trying to redress the effects of injustice by transferring power from one set of rulers to another. Only by the calm exertion

of thought, applied to essential economic conditions, he points out, can a real revolution be brought about, a revolution that requires neither violence nor compulsion and will fulfil all the hopes of those socialists who would abolish the exploitation of man by man.

Daudé Bancel did not speak English, and to English eyes he appeared a typical Frenchman. Yet in this last article one feels his voice as the calm accent of reason, the universal language of all men at all times. Georgeists will recognise that the belief in revolutionary violence of the past has its counterpart in the belief today in the compulsory powers of the state, acting on the mythical authority of the experts. This assuredly will go the way of the old superstitions. But reason will endure.

Meanwhile Georgeists throughout the world can gather inspiration from this example of the tenacity of one who laboured so faithfully in a country where recent events have made progress especially difficult. Sympathy, perhaps in practical form, will go to our French comrades.

## Journey Through Gobbledygookia

BY ERLING NORLEV

**T**HE STUDY OF ECONOMICS has been again and again led astray by the vain idea that economics must proceed according to the pattern of other sciences" says Ludwig von Mises in his recent book *The Ultimate Foundation of Economic Science*. A multitude of textbooks confirms his statement.

The purpose of science, including its use of mathematics, is clarification, i.e. making complex phenomena simple. In economics, the "scientific approach" and its concurrent abuse of mathematics seems to have the opposite purpose of making simple things complicated. The following examples of economic gobbledygook were gleaned from Prof. Paul A. Samuelson's textbook in economics, which is widely used at American colleges and universities, and holds some additional interest in that its author is one of the economic "experts" of the Kennedy administration. The quotations could, unfortunately, just as well have been found in scores of other works:

"People must be . . . abstaining from making net saving become negative."

"Note how the area of inequality on the Lorenz diagram has been reduced; progressive taxation has shifted the solid line into the broken line nearer to the 45° line."

"The Best-Profit point is the quantity at which the slopes of the total revenue curve and the total cost curve

are exactly parallel; and where the slope of the total profit curve is zero and horizontal."

If it does not seem fair to quote explanations accompanying diagrams without showing the diagrams proper, my excuse is that the diagrams are even more obscure than their captions, and that total murkiness scares me. The point is that most modern economists refuse to state simply and directly and in so many words what they are talking about. A Samuelsonish explanation of "Fig. 2" reads, for example: "CC is the propensity-to-consume and SS the propensity-to-save schedules for the community. Note that these are closely related: the break-even point B is shown on the upper diagram where SS intersects the horizontal axis . . ." All he is *really* trying to say is: "Whatever people don't consume, they save . . ." and his only valid excuse for not saying so would be the fact that his publisher pays him by the word.

Since most modern economics can be reduced to a few exorcisms à la "Make the economy grow four per cent. a year", "government pump priming", and "mild inflation", it is very hard to see any reason for the garbling language of the Gobbledygookians except pure and unadulterated snobbery. The reader senses the frustration experienced by the economist, as he has to dabble at an unnatural science instead of a natural one, from the following outbursts by Mr. Samuelson:

" . . . these abstract round-the-clock psycho-dramas by which modern economists try to rid themselves of their inferiority complexes and frustrations . . . "