

## The Georgeist Movement in Spain

By Jordi Fivaller

It is not our intention to present an academic study of the historical and economic changes in Spain prior to the beginnings of Georgeism in the Iberian Peninsula. It is true that such a detailed survey would be extremely interesting, especially if it were to treat of the various popular movements in Spain during the Middle Ages such as those of the "remenses" in Catalonia, the "germanies" in Valencia, and the "comuneros" in Castile, all of which were inspired by the vehement desire of the rural working and middle classes to secure their just rights to liberty and progress. We could also, with advantage, show the lessons to be learnt from an analysis of the nefarious taxation and protectionist measures enforced during the reigns of Philip II and Charles I, culminating in the disastrous administration of the Grand-Duke of Olivares, the loss of the American Colonies, and the infamous reign of Ferdinand VII. If, in addition, we passed from hard economic fact, from the world as it is in practice, to the world of ideas, a study of the analytical works of such famous men as Francisco Centani in the 17th, and Florez Estrada in the 18th century, which threw so much light on economic phenomena, would be no less instructive.

But no; we have a more modest aim. We shall confine ourselves to the immediate study of present-day Spain, always seeking to relate our deductions and points of view to the opportunities and difficulties the Georgeist movement has met, and is meeting, in our country. We therefore pass over the whole train of events which overshadow with pain, blood and tears, the last five centuries of Spain's history, and, not pausing even to give consideration to the conclusions of those eminent men who, in an embryonic sort of way, were precursors of Henry George in our country, we find ourselves at once at the dawn of the present century.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the situation of the rural masses in Spain was simply desperate, and so, for that matter, was that of the working classes in the big industrial cities. The insurrections of the former, always the occasion for bloodshed, and the Trade Union struggles of the latter could not in the least diminish the almost unlimited power of the landowning clique, integrated

as it was with the so-called " Nobility"; that pillar of the Monarchy which was, in reality, of the greatest danger to the permanent interests of that Institution by virtue of its completely reactionary attitude. Actually, more than fourteen of Spain's provinces were, both by law and custom, the property of the aristocratic class. Extensive areas, comprising almost the whole of the districts of Albacete, Almería, Badajoz, Cáceres, Cádiz, Ciudad Real, Córdoba, Granada, Huelva, Jaén, Málaga, Salamanca, Sevilla, and Toledo, were monopolised by a handful of people who resided more or less permanently in Madrid. More than 878,000 acres belonged to and were divided between, the Duke of Medinaceli, the Marquess de Comillas, the Count de Mora, and the Dukes of Peñaranda, Alba, Arión and Lerma. In a like manner, although not to such a large extent, there was monopolised Guadalajara, Navarra, Zaragoza, Lérida, etc., all of which could be most satisfactorily explained by the Count de Romanones, the Duke of Solferino, the Marquess of Sentmenat, etc.

This melancholy state of affairs could only result in great misery for the peasants and a most nervous unrest amongst the industrial workers, accompanied by a noticeable spread of anarchistic and revolutionary ideas.

That, then, was the situation when the first Georgeists took up the cudgels in Spain. With the " Single Tax " as their mouthpiece, the followers of Henry George, got their movement under way: Albendín, Lazarraga, Senador, Argente, Rico, and many more fighters for the great ideal threw themselves into the struggle to further our principles. The Ronda Conference of 1911 was a magnificent example of the strength and enthusiasm of those out and out defenders of justice and liberty. A start was made on the great task of education, and this marked the beginning also of the work of translating what in the end comprised practically all the works of the Philosopher. *Progress and Poverty, Social Problems, The Science of Political Economy, Protection or Free Trade, The Condition of Labour*, and various others were launched into circulation as well as some of the excellent works of Argente and Senador Gomez amongst others.

The World War of 1914-18, the bloody partisan strife, and the growth of the forces of Socialism during the years prior to Primo de Rivera's dictatorship did much to retard the progressive acceptance of our principles. During the dictatorship of 1923-31 the progressive elements could not do other than remain silent, from the political and cultural point of view, whilst an unjust distribution of wealth went hand in hand with a wicked land monopoly.

### *The Republic*

With the coming of the Republic, new and magnificent horizons were opened to the Georgeist movement. During this period there was clearly some confusion in leading circles, due partly to the

absence, in many cases, of that proper political organisation necessary for the carrying out of the new tasks of Government—so different from the business of street skirmishing or rousing the socially aspiring masses. The common people were no less bewildered, principally because they lacked the necessary cultural and political media and were so steeped in poverty under the Monarchy. Nevertheless, despite everything, there were great possibilities, in that, once things settled down a bit, the Land Problem came right into the picture. The persistent and patient work of the first generation of Spanish Georgeists began to bear fruit. True, the Marxist majority, the Moderate Socialists, who were predominant in the country at that time, could not easily free itself from the influence of its own doctrines; but the important thing was that the subject was under discussion. Time would do the rest.

And so it turned out. On the 15th September, 1933, there was enacted the law decreeing, as was unavoidable, that the Nobility be deprived of their estates; in 1934 the authorities in Sevilla were given power to impose a tax of up to 2 per cent on all sites, whether built on or not, which resulted in a fall in land values; on the 13th April, 1933, the Catalonian Parliament authorised all Municipalities having more than 10,000 inhabitants to impose a tax of up to 1 per cent, on all sites whether built on or not; and on the 14th June, 1934, this same autonomous body passed the Law of Contract to Cultivate, Etc.

At the end of 1933 the Spanish Georgeists organised themselves anew, forming the "Spanish League of Georgeists" with *Social Reform* as their monthly magazine. In Catalonia the "Georgeist Association of Catalonia" was founded. The works of George, Rusby, Post, and others were re-edited and, in addition, books by Wedgwood, Hirsch, Albendin, Argente, Senador Gomez, Rico Tolstoy, Grant Allen, Lamas, Sancez Mejias, W. R. Lester, etc., appeared on the market. In 1936 the first synthesis of Georgeist economic doctrine was published in the Catalán language.

The Georgeists wrote in the daily papers, held short lecture courses and conferences, and intensified their propaganda activities. The combined action of Lemos Ortega from Sevilla, and Fernando Valera from Valencia, resulted in the Republican Union Party adopting purely Georgeist resolutions, and Serra Gasulla, making good use of a Youth Congress held in Barcelona, caused the executive of the majority party in the Catalonian Parliament, and nearly all the Municipalities, to pass resolutions which were absolutely Georgeist. The Georgeist Movement was at this time vitally active, and efforts were intensified in Sevilla, Madrid, Barcelona, Málaga, Zaragoza, Bilbao, etc.

Here, then, lies the reason why those vested interests, threatened with destruction in the fight, organised in Republican Spain against injustice and privilege, launched their attack on 18th

July, 1936. It was, in fact, the landowners, the Church, and the monopolists, who supported the rebellion of soldiers and falangists, headed in time by Franco.

### *The Civil War*

It is not for us as Georgeists to make much play of political rights and wrongs. Every Georgeist can belong to whatever party or organisation he fancies, or he need not belong to any at all. Thus we may observe with due objectivity the maelstrom of political strife which may envelop us. Thus we recognise that the policies adopted by irresponsible anarchistic elements, both before and during the Civil War, were inexcusable. The irresponsible way in which strikes were started on the slightest excuse, and the great number of absurd atrocities and crimes committed deserves the most energetic condemnation of every decent-minded person. But, unfortunately, there is equal cause to censure those who, in the name of God and Country committed the most brutal assassinations and atrocities: without exposing themselves to danger they imprisoned and shot people wherever Franco's troops, with the help of the Nazis, the Italian Fascists and the Moors, had made themselves masters of the situation.

The catastrophic situation which prevailed after the Civil War left deep scars, rancours, and injustices, which will be difficult to erase so long as the present generation lives and the status quo is maintained. Every day which Spain endures under the present political régime is a day lost to the cause of stability, peace and justice amongst its people; and this, in turn, has an adverse effect both on world peace and the prospects for Georgeism.

### *The Disaster*

The fortunes of the Georgeist Movement have been at a very low ebb here in Spain, since the end of the Civil War. The present laws do not allow us to act in concert and it is impossible for us to distribute any literature or to carry on any propaganda whatsoever. We have to watch helplessly whilst the State creates all sorts of privileges and monopolies, and whilst bureaucracy, incapable and immoral as it is, becomes more despotic every day, gaining in influence and power. We are living the great lie of "Social Security" which has only served to set up a burdensome administrative machine to the detriment of the true interests of the middle and working class people who see their legitimate rights and returns diminishing without any proper and just compensation. The disgust is general, but the efficiency of the State Secret Police and the effectiveness of those coercive means at the disposal of a modern totalitarian state completely stultify any popular action against the tyranny endured. Both the political philosophy and methods of those who hold the reins of power are extraordinarily similar to

that which pertains in Eastern European Communist countries and have similar results. The true Church, not subject to the official yoke, suffers from the effects of falangist despotism. The proof of this lies in the execution and imprisonment of Basque priests during the Civil War, the death in exile of Cardinals Vidal and Barraquer, and the pastoral letters from the Bishops of Astorga, from the Canary Isles and Sevilla, from Monsignor Pildain and Cardinal Segura.

The full weight of the disaster was felt by the supporters of Georgeism in Spain. Dr. Lazarraga, Sancez Mejias, engineer, the valiant Marcellano Rico, and so many others fell victims of the bombing or the penalties of war. The distinguished Colonel Moreno Molina, "Landless John," was sentenced to death, but died before they could shoot him; the scholarly Antonio Leonís died a victim of the persecution to which he was exposed; Dr. Antonio Ariza and the notary Blas Infantes were assassinated; D. Lufs Companys, President of the General Assembly of Catalonia, on being handed over by the Germans, from France, was shot after an infamous trial behind closed doors and without the slightest chance of defence. Fernando de los Rios has recently died in exile; then there is Fernando de Valera, a Minister of the Republican Government in exile, Rogelio Casas and Saborit, and many others away from their country. We prudently omit the names of those Georgeists actually living in Spain, whose defence of liberal principles and doctrines has earned for them imprisonment and every sort of misery and persecution.

Our numbers are reduced to a tenth of what they were and only a handful of self-denying, distinguished, and brave fighters for our ideals stand firm, defending themselves as best they can and attacking the wicked world around them with what little strength they have; without hope but with noble unselfishness, the fruit of their faith in things true. While the oldest Spanish Georgeist is at the close of his life in Pamplona, sadly embittered and disillusioned we have from the penetrating mind and brilliant pen of one of our most able colleagues in Madrid this statement: ". . . People in Spain to-day are not actuated by ideas but only by material motives of personal gain, and they only concern themselves with the immediate surroundings and prospects. This is a consequence of the situation in which we found ourselves and of the difficulty experienced by the majority of people in earning a living. They are not to be blamed. Past and present circumstances have brought about the free reign of primitive instincts, and these are predominant over the processes of thought. . . . We lack the men and money needed to publish a journal. Apart from that, none of the economic and fiscal measures in force to-day could be discussed. One would have to confine one's self to generalities which would bore the reader since nobody is in the least interested in purely scientific problems. That is why one can't help being pessimistic over the chances of success."

### *The Present Situation and its Possibilities*

Such, then, are the personal impressions of a famous Georgeist, showing how utterly impossible it is at present to do anything to further our ideals. The same distinguished scholar said on another occasion: "We few Georgeists who are left can scarcely do anything. We have neither the necessary means nor that free Spanish society essential for the interchange of social ideas. It is not possible for us to act in concert or associate in any way, neither can we publish anything, for that which deviates from official dogma excites suspicion. Critical articles are not allowed to appear in the papers and although some of a Georgeist flavour see the light of day, they are so "watered down" as to pass unrecognised as such save by those who are already well versed in Georgeist doctrine. They are of no special significance to the rest."

A brave fighter from Sevilla, dealing with the same subject, affirms: ". . . . Neither do I deem it advisable to publish a Georgeist Bulletin, as the Censor would suppress it and not a single copy would appear. Apart from that, the Georgeist nucleus remaining in Spain is far too small to bear the cost of such a periodical."

The country has now been led to such extremes that the Sevillian Georgeist to whom we have alluded is justified in saying: "At the present time, 70 per cent. of the National Income is squeezed from the producers to meet the demands of the State, the Committees, the Municipalities, the Syndicates, and the Social Services. The only points of difference between the Spanish and Russian régimes are that 30 per cent. of the produce is still divided between employers and workpeople, that the rich still retain a little freedom and the illusion of being masters, and that there are priests and churches. We have come very near to Communism; the bureaucrats and the fixed salary earners are prepared; one step more and we shall amaze Stalin by becoming Communist without his lifting a finger. What a surprise for the Western Democracies!"

#### *Attitude and Outlook*

There is no other solution but to hope that, sooner or later, democracy will return to Spain, and that with it new possibilities will be open for us Georgeists in the field of education and conversion. Then the combined action of the Georgeist Schools and the political fighters for our doctrine will make possible the progress of our ideals.

In the meantime, whilst we are looking forward to the return of liberty in all its splendour, and with the object of keeping alive the spirit which animates those who stand firm in defence of our principles, it would mean much to us if a Bulletin in the Spanish language were to be published in London, Mexico or Cuba. It could be a Spanish version or edition of *Land and Liberty*, suitably adapted to meet the needs of the countries it is intended for, containing special articles and data from the Spanish speaking world, and published under the auspices of the International Union for

Land Value Taxation and Free Trade. For such a paper, special postal and financial arrangements would have to be made. Copies might be sent in the form of postal packets to Spain, Argentina, Cuba, Mexico, etc., all of which countries offer magnificent possibilities for Georgeism now and in the future. This end could be attained without great economic sacrifice if concerted efforts were made by those who speak Spanish and those whose interests lie in that direction. At first, the Bulletin could be run off on a multi-graph machine, and, when circumstances became more favourable, it could be properly printed in the style of *Land and Liberty*.

### *The International Union and Human Rights*

We have summarised the situation in Spain, and that which has been described is very similar to the sad state of affairs in which the unfortunate Russians and the peoples of the satellite countries of Bolshevist-Communism have to exist. We must have no illusions. One is either for Liberty and Justice or one is not. They stand or fall together and with them, truth. That is why Georgeism can never flourish in totalitarian countries, be they Communist or Fascist. Without the necessary premises of political liberty there can never be either economic freedom or the progress of ideas.

This is the case in Spain to-day and the reason why Georgeism never sees the light. That is why we agree with the summing-up by the U.S. Secretary of State, Mr. Dean Acheson, of the Franco Régime, which was broadcast on May 11th last, with the approval of President Truman: ". . . . The fact is that in Spain a Government was established which was copied from the régimes in Italy and Germany and which was, and is, a Fascist Government and a dictatorship. . . . I believe that the fundamental liberty—the liberty of the individual—does not lie in high-sounding phrases but in certain simple procedures and creeds; and of the factors indispensable for the liberty of the individual, I should rank foremost the right of "habeus corpus" and the existence of an independant jurisdiction. These do not exist in Spain. I believe, a second fundamental right is, that no person can be sentenced to imprisonment without having been found guilty of some crime in law, and tried by persons appointed by the State. The verdict must be delivered by a jury, and this right does not exist in Spain. It is obvious to Western European countries that it is impossible to establish intimate economic and defence relations with a régime of this kind. The U.S. policy aims at co-operation with Spaniards in order to achieve these essential liberties in Spain, and also the acceptance of Spain by Western Europeans into the community of nations."

Finally, Walter Lippman wrote in the *New York Herald Tribune*: "One has to bear in mind that Franco's régime relies on the total submission of the defenceless mass of the population to an

odious military dictatorship. The order and calm which so much impresses the casual visitor is just a thin veneer which conceals a rebellious spirit of non-compliance."

It is for these reasons that we believe it an opportune moment to ask the "International Union" clearly to give its open support, not only to its own Georgeist principles, but also to the Charter of Human Rights approved by the United Nations Organisation.

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