

"THE LABOUR QUESTION"



HARRY LLEWELYN DAVIES
1866-1923

*To whom the reader is indebted for this abridgment of
THE CONDITION OF LABOUR by Henry George*

As announced last month, *THE LABOUR QUESTION* is once more in circulation. The abridgment is the work of Harry Llewelyn Davies, who passed from us at his home at Birling Gap, Eastbourne, three years ago, 1st May, 1923. He was chief among the disciples of Henry George, one of the foremost advocates of land value taxation, and this pamphlet was one of his enduring gifts to the movement.

This new issue of *THE LABOUR QUESTION*, published by the United Committee, at a time of limited financial resources when much literature is in demand with little hope of its immediate appearance, has been made possible by Mrs. Davies. It is a timely contribution to our stock of literature and can be taken to be a mark of her abiding attachment to the ideas her husband made his own. We are free to say that it gives Mrs. Davies a feeling of deep satisfaction to know that this publication is once more available. We feel assured that this sentiment will be cordially and affectionately reciprocated by our people everywhere, and especially by former friends and colleagues of Harry Davies.

In a pleasing and interesting Foreword to this memorial edition of the pamphlet, Mrs. Davies writes:—

"Harry Davies' first introduction to the doctrines of Henry George was on the occasion when as an apprentice at Napier's works in Glasgow he attended a meeting of the Henry George Club at which he had been invited to read a paper. He was at that time immersed in Fabianism and eager to impart his knowledge and faith to others. In later years he used to enjoy telling of his experience on that occasion. How he stood up and confidently proclaimed the truth as he saw it and how, when he had finished, his hearers tore all his pet theories to pieces so that not a shred was left!

"But for all that he did not desert his position; in fact, the very strength of the opposition he met with roused the fighter in him, and only after weeks and months of nightly discussions did he come to doubt the efficacy of Fabianism as a means of solving social problems. Then once the old faith was gone something else had to take its place and he set himself to study the ideas of Henry George. Gradually he became convinced of the rightness and truth of these ideas and he made them his own and they became a religion to him. Later on he made a pilgrimage to America to visit Henry George whom he regarded as an inspired

prophet, and this religion entered into all his work and all his dealings with men.

"In 1901 he became managing director of an engineering works in the south of Scotland, a post which he held up to the time of his death in 1923. He came to his work with no knowledge of business or business management; but he always kept clearly before him the idea that the works were to be carried on so as to be a benefit to all concerned and to that end he strove with all his might. He realized that sympathetic understanding and friendly co-operation between employers and employed were the first consideration; it was in that spirit that he met all the difficulties that are inevitable in such undertakings.

"Inspectors and visitors to the works frequently remark on the general atmosphere of good fellowship and keenness over work which is apparent during a walk through the shops, and they sometimes ask how such a state of things is brought about. Had they known the personality of Harry Davies, the spirit which animated him and his power of communicating that spirit to others, they would have understood.

"He truly loved his fellow men and his deep human sympathy and love of liberty and truth and justice inspired him with the belief that these could be reached if only people would faithfully follow the light of reason. He believed that a better understanding among men was possible, and longed for it passionately, and strove for it in all his activities.

"His struggle at the works was not merely to make his own living in his own way, but to win conditions under which all concerned in the works might co-operate to the utmost of their ability in freedom and justice. What was achieved was achieved only because of his belief in a wider emancipation, which could only be reached by eliminating monopoly from industry according to the principles of Henry George.

"Under existing economic conditions the conflict between capital and labour was a dog fight in which each side, ignoring the fact that both were hampered and oppressed and robbed by monopoly, turned on one another; and instead of freeing themselves from the common enemy of land monopoly, employers and employed attempted to arm themselves for their mutual conflict with similar weapons of restriction and tyranny.

"While such conditions remained the works were carried on so as to mitigate them as far as possible in that corner of the vineyard, and to show the possibilities which could be realized under the fuller economic freedom. Without the fundamental economic change those possibilities could not be secured anywhere because nowhere could they be complete or sure until they were universal. Free access to, and utilization of, the natural resources of our country and of the world was the requisite justice which would enable men to co-operate in prosperity and good will.

"The understanding of this economic analysis and the moral obligation to establish the social conditions to which it pointed, and the belief in human nature which would be set free to develop under those conditions, was the key to all Harry's strivings. Side by side with the successful effort to found freedom and justice at the works, so far as conditions would allow, was the constant effort to spread an understanding of the economic changes which must be brought about by applying the principles of Henry George in politics as the foundation of a better Society.

"From boyhood those principles had taken possession of his mind with a completeness which can only be appreciated by those who have a similar understanding of them, and know how they work out through every tangle of social problems which has to be explored."