

Reminiscences of a German Bodenreformer

By DR. OTTO JULIUSBURGER

[Translated by Helen Bernstein]

[We are fortunate in having contacted Dr. Otto Juliusburger, German psychiatrist and ardent Georgeist, who has been in this country less than a year. Dr. Juliusburger found us through our listing in the telephone directory as the Single Tax Association. We welcome his present account of the German Bodenreform movement, and look forward to future articles which the Doctor promises to write. Our thanks are due Helen Bernstein for translating this work from the German.—Ed.]

DURING the decade ending 1933 I was a convinced member of the German Bodenreform (land reform) movement, which was under the leadership of the unforgettable Dr. Adolf Damaschke. In that year, National Socialism overwhelmed the membership of the Bodenreform movement. In relating my experiences in the movement, I must rely to a great extent upon my memory, since my books and manuscripts were confiscated when I left Germany in July, 1941, with my wife, to join my children in the United States. I am happy and grateful to be able to remain in this country, one of whose great sons was Henry George.

If I may say something about myself, my scholastic background prepared the way for my embracing the philosophy of Henry George. When I was a student at the University of Breslau in 1887, I became passionately absorbed in the ideas of Spinoza, Schopenhauer and Feuerbach—three thinkers with whom I still feel the closest affinity. These three philosophers shared a fundamental idea which was then new to me—namely, that the land plays a decisive role, not merely in individual life, but in the life of a nation and of nations.

Spinoza, being of Jewish origin, was conversant with the Mosaic social legislation, especially the land laws. I refer the reader to his "Political Treatise" and relevant sections in his "Politico-Theological Treatise," which are lamentably neglected in contemporary Spinozistic literature. Similarly, one finds no mention among the scholars about Schopenhauer's precept in his "Parerga and Parilapomena": "Whether the peasant or the land which nourishes him belongs to me; the bird or his food; the fruit or the tree—is in reality of small difference." Eilenstein, a German translator of Henry George, is the only one who speaks of the above precept. Feuerbach, renowned author of "Das Wesen des Christentums," an inexhaustible well of the deepest psychological knowledge, says, in his posthumous work, "On Ethics": "The Delphic Oracle, in opposition to the stupid monarch Croesus, who felt himself the luckiest man because of his immeasurable riches, declared that the poor and virtuous Arcadian, Aglans, was more fortunate. The poor and virtuous Aglans had his own field which, though small, was quite sufficient to sustain him. His moral system was thus built on a good material foundation."

Goethe also was aware of the land question. In his "Faust" appear these remarkable lines (which I quoted in my article "Goethe and the Social Challenge of His Time," published in the *Gross-Berlin Aerzteblatt*, 1933):

"Fain would I see such glad turmoil
With a free people on a free soil."

There are numerous examples in Goethe's prose to permit the conclusion that he fully grasped the land question. I am convinced that Goethe had attained this understanding through Giordano Bruno and especially Spinoza.

I should like to mention another influence in my life—my friendship with Arnold Dodel and Ernst Haeckel, famous Darwinists—Dodel in the botanical field and Haeckel in the zoological field. Haeckel was a resolute liberal and espoused the cause of social individualism, but never entered political life. Dodel, inspired by Henry George and Friedrich Albert Lange, became convinced that salvation from the evils of unbridled capitalism could be won only through the removal of the land monopoly. In his excellent work, "Peasant, Worker and Scholar," he appeals for the cooperation of these three groups, and offers irrefutable examples in support of Henry George.

Lange was another man whose affinity with Henry George has been unjustly ignored. In his "Labor Questions," Lange speaks of the decisive nature of land monopoly and recommends its taxation in order to cure social ills.

On the whole, the educated classes in Germany are deplorably unfamiliar with the significance of land and land reform. One who has followed the trends of the so-called educated classes in Germany and who has felt the effects of their behavior will be obliged to comment on their total ignorance of sociological knowledge, particularly of the works of Henry George.

In my own field I often encountered this ignorance and apathy. In 1927 the German Physicians' Congress met, for which I drew up ten theses in support of Henry George, Adolf Damaschke and Franz Oppenheimer. I concluded that the medical profession should support in its entirety the Bodenreform movement. In the main my theses were ignored by the medical journals. The Congress finally decided on the following vacillating resolution: "The Bodenreform movement deserves great attention; in it are contained such indisputably lofty and noble goals and worthy proposals for the elimination of bad housing conditions, that the Forty-sixth German Physicians' Congress pledges its trust in the idealism of the Bodenreform movement." Not a doctor present vouch-

safed my theses. One physician offered the kindly suggestion that I, otherwise a healing physician, had to be cured myself; especially of my conviction of the importance of land reform.

The medical profession was influenced a little by the great Adolf Damaschke, who on his sixtieth birthday (in 1925) was awarded an honorary doctor's degree by the University of Berlin. Damaschke, characteristically, accepted this degree through a hope of more effectively working for land reform and better housing conditions. Unfortunately, however, despite all efforts the great doctrines of land reform struck no real roots in the medical profession. I would rather say nothing of the profession after 1933 lest I become bitter.

Damaschke worked indefatigably to spread the Bodenreform movement. He sought to recruit members from all political and religious camps and met with some success. Because of this, he hesitated to introduce Henry George's more profound and broader generalizations as a basis for the German Bodenreform movement; and although he propagated George's works, no effort was made to bring before the German people the international significance of George's ideas. Herein, I think, lay the weakness of the movement, despite its large membership. This too, I believe, is the reason for the cool reception given to Joseph Fels when he visited Germany. I myself have only recently begun to realize how lofty in both intellect and spirit was Fels.

An outstanding exception to the general subordination of Henry George's moral contribution was in the work of my friend, Franz Oppenheimer, who is now living in Hollywood, and despite his advanced age, is still at his work. Oppenheimer is a devoted disciple and student of Henry George, and it can be stated emphatically that George's philosophy forms the foundation for his great sociological structure. With Oppenheimer one must mention the late Dr. Muller-Lyer, who also based his work on George.

Franz Oppenheimer joins Marx on the latter's principle, "The monopoly of land forms the indispensable condition for capitalistic production." Oppenheimer also goes along with Marx on the theory that concentrated monopoly of land expropriates the laborer from the soil and causes him to join the army of proletarians.

Damaschke also seized on this fundamental idea of Marx, which he set forth in his paper, "Land Reform and Marxism," but presented, naturally, as in Oppenheimer's case, in the spirit of Henry George as opposed to Marx. This paper of Damaschke's earned him a shameful attack from the Minister of Agriculture, Darré.* Although Darré insulted him in a most infamous manner, this did not prevent Damaschke's son-in-law, the Mayor Dr. Graeber, from working for a National Socialist newspaper in the vain hope that National Socialism

would result in a realization of land reform. The baselessness of this hope was fully revealed in the role of midwife which the German landed aristocracy played in the birth of Nazi power. As Conrad Heiden pointed out in his book, "Adolf Hitler," published in 1936, Hitler clearly stated that settlement on and cultivation of German soil were madness and cowardice. It was, he said, much more profitable for the German peasant to acquire land in the East. The Prussian landowner, Prince Eulenberg, had, according to Heiden, promised unqualified support to Hitler from the German landowners. One must always keep these revelations of Heiden in mind in order to understand the roots of Nazism and its warlike development.

Damaschke, though attacked by Darré and others, was a thorough patriot who had developed a fine social conscience. It was at the penultimate awarding of the Nobel Prize, I believe, that he was nominated for the prize by the famous professor of jurisprudence at the University of Muenster, Dr. Ehrmann. In his letter of recommendation, Ehrmann stated clearly that the social beliefs of George and Damaschke were the only possible way of avoiding war, the cause of which, though concealed, can be traced to the land problem. What a different path world history might have travelled had men like George, Damaschke and Oppenheimer been heeded!

I must also mention another man who expressed similar ideas—the late Prof. Norbert Peters, a well-known scholar of the Old Testament. In 1937 he wrote a book entitled, "Social Provisions in the Old Testament," in which he discussed the immortal land legislation of Moses. This work, unfortunately and characteristically, found no echo. Prof. Peters wrote to me, however, remarking how different history would have been if the advisers of Kaiser Wilhelm II had known and appreciated the social provisions of the Old Testament.

Another outstanding German Bodenreformer and follower of Henry George was Dr. Hans Kurella, translator of the works of the great Cesare Lombroso. Lombroso himself was an avowed Georgeist and saw in land reform a means of eradicating crime. He had opportunity to see the effects of land monopoly when he discovered the cause of pellagra in the use of contaminated maize which the avaricious Italian landowners were selling to the peasants. A German follower of Lombroso was Dr. Simons, who wrote on this subject. He once sent me a letter saying he was happy to have found in my works an intellectual comrade.

Wilhelm Ostwald, the leader of the German Monistenbund (Society of Monists), is particularly deserving of mention. He had deduced from his theory of energy reasons for the necessity of land reform. "Is it necessary to prove," he wrote to Damaschke, "that the connection between the individual and his source of energy, the land, cannot be too close and unbreakable?" But Ostwald found no response to his ideas in the Monistenbund.

* Richard-Walther Darré was also Minister of Food and Agriculture under the Nazi régime, up to May, 1942, when he received an indefinite leave of absence "for reasons of health." He is replaced by Herbert Backe. It is believed that the change has been prompted by the serious food situation in Germany.—Ed.

Thus it was always throughout the whole German intelligentsia. Outside of a handful of exceptional men, social problems in general and the land problem in particular were ignored and treated with contempt. This gives a key to the understanding of the treason and capitulation of the educated classes in 1933 and the years that followed. Man needs a social ideal in normal times as well as abnormal times; without it culture and civilization break down and decline. I wrote a paper on this theme, entitled "Psychotherapy and Land Reform," in which I proposed a new method in the treatment of the mind and psyche—that is, to teach people the fundamentals of land reform so that they will be released from the socially conditioned feeling of uncertainty and imbued with a new energy and will to live. Need I add that this paper was ignored in medical circles?

The idealistic paragraph 155 of the Weimar Constitution, completely in the spirit of Henry George, was—painful as is the thought—completely unknown to the German people. It was the great work of Friedrich Naumann, friend of Damaschke, to introduce into the legislature a land reform based upon the constitutional land rights of the German people—but despite the great efforts of the Bodenreformers, the attempt to bring into practice paragraph 155 of the Weimar Constitution did not succeed. The other political parties betrayed the cause, while the small landowner party always succeeded in beating down every land reform effort, every step toward the elimination of the evil of land monopoly.

Another effort of Damaschke's which was defeated was his practically worked-out plan of homesteads for soldiers at the close of the last war—a plan which had gained the support of many prominent men and women and corporations. I recall how inspired the soldiers at the front and hospitals were when the news of promised homesteads was brought to them. What was their disillusionment when this, too, was crushed!

The philosophy of Henry George, and his diagnosis and cure for social ills, was taken up in Germany by such remarkable men as Oppenheimer, Damaschke, Muller-Lyer and others. But the Bodenreform movement did not succeed, because the concept of land reform was grasped only by a few, and it did not gain deep and wide mass support. The sun had shone on the peak but the valleys below still lay in darkness and the masses slept. Meanwhile, the results of ignoring the diagnosis and cure of George—results which George himself foresaw—were occurring. Civilization was in danger of decline and the menacing symptoms began to appear—the subordination of the individual, the retrogression of social individualism, and the displacement of true religion by a murderous race theory.

Let us hope that at the end of a victorious war, those in the seat of authority will be able to realize the social goal of Henry George. Let us hope that even now this goal may be carried into the hearts of those whose heavy task it is to defend America against her enemies.