

ITALY

Henry George Doctrine Advocated

BY COMM. LUIGI KAMBO

Acknowledging our indebtedness to Mr George Crosoer, we are glad to print his translation from a brilliant paper entitled *The Distribution of the Land* contributed by Comm. Luigi Kambo to the Annals of the National Fascist Association of Civil Engineers, in Rome, Italy. The paper is published as a separate monograph bearing the date April, 1927. It treats of the Single Tax on Land Value in a profoundly scientific way and higher mathematics are introduced to complete the demonstration. Mr Crosoer has provided us with the opening and closing passages and it will be seen how ably the author deals with the philosophy of the subject. The service rendered by Comm. Kambo is the more notable as it raises the standard of Henry George in Italy and it is doubly gratifying to see that his views have found expression under favourable auspices leading, we hope, to their wider acceptance.

The present system of taxation does not only permit the impoverishment of the land almost without limit, but, through it, a boundary of ownership sometimes separates a field intensively cultivated from a permanent pasture, a zone intensively used from one which might be used, but it permits also that the area assigned to various proprietors varies between extreme limits, from a few square metres to hundreds of square kilometres, without relation between the surface possessed and the qualifications and financial status of the various proprietors.

This is true not only of the Old World but also of the younger American republics, which, not being weighted with the traditions of Europe and Asia, could have been a field for experiment for every innovation of civilization. This, however, is not due to simple coincidence, but the two facts are strictly connected, for, if America had completed a real territorial policy, Europe would have been constrained to imitate her immediately, under the threat of being dried up by the absorption, on the part of America, of the vital fluids of labour and capital. This danger is imminent: think that Argentina, Brazil and Canada are together equal in area to 70 of Italy, with only 50 millions of inhabitants.

The great Argentine thinker, Faustino Domingo Sarmiento, thus expressed himself in his Presidential Message of 1868:—

“By reason of the most short-sighted system of colonization which a people have ever had, the most populated part of the Republic is already private property without the immigrant finding a foot of surface exempt from the obstacles which private property opposes to his acquiring it. With 900,000 square miles, and with a population of a million-and-a-half, two-thirds of these would not know where to establish their dwelling, nor the immigrant where to put his household gods.

“In the expectation of 100,000 immigrants yearly, we must from now face the task of preparing for them the easy acquisition of land, and of passing laws which shall prevent an individual from possessing himself of a territory which would suffice, in Europe, to sustain a kingdom, and which shall also prevent the present generation from despoiling the future of their right to have a home and a piece of land which they may call their inheritance.”

Sacred words! Worthy of the great man who liberated his country from the mad tyranny of Rozas, and from the last shades of ignorance, of obscurantism and from the hatred of wisdom.

Unfortunately, however, the statistics of 1916, about half a century later, let us know that things are not much changed. In the province of Buenos Aires, which alone is as large as France, and is the most populous, there were only 64,250 proprietors, of whom 41,000 possessed less than 100 hectares, while 317 possessed more than 10,000 hectares each!

[This is expressed in a diagram which gives a vivid presentation of the proportions—or disproportions—involved.]

These few great proprietors—lords of the Argentine soil—are the owners of the finest mansions on the great Avenues of Buenos Aires, and the most sumptuous castles in the great *estancias*, who live most of their time in the grand hotels of Paris and London, or who occupy hereditarily, not by right but in fact, the highest posts. The journal *Mundo Argentino* (1st December, 1916) comments: “it might be said that these carry the country in their pocket, having each more than 10,000 hectares, some 20,000 and even 30,000.”

In other parts of Argentina there are properties of 100, 200, and even 600 square leagues, a square league being a square of five kilometres, or 2,500 hectares.

Much more could be added to show the influence of the Single Tax in commerce, in industry, in the professions; to study as to economic effects, the abolition of the custom-houses and of industrial protection on the basis of duties at entry; to see how with the Single Tax would be facilitated the gradual reduction of the National Debt, through the enormous fiscal simplification, its effect on the regular planning of towns; but that which we have already explained is sufficient to make understood the great importance of the reform and its numerous applications. This, though attacked strongly by those who believe themselves to be injured by it, and by those who, even being benefited do not know it, continues establishing itself strongly in America, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa.

The masses, it is well known, act more fundamentally from passion than from reason; in history, says Wilfred Pareto, the great economist, the actions *non-logical* have much greater importance than the *logical*. Now the Single Tax is a doctrine too philosophical, too mathematical, too Christian . . . to be able to arouse the feelings of the masses, who so easily swallow the big words and the paradoxes of Marxism and the preaching of destructive violence.

The writer, having arrived at the end of this exposition, of which those colleagues who have attentively followed it will be able to judge “the long study and the great love,” must confess that he does not entertain the least illusion as to the direct influence of his efforts upon legislation, and still less upon the actual mentality of the population; however much he may have the conviction, not of having told *all* the truth, for this is unlimited, but of having told *always* the truth, he knows well that the effect of this depends, not upon its importance, but on the political height, so to say, from

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which it falls. The first is great, but the second is, for the writer, absolutely none, or certainly much inferior, in his own country, to that which he has indirectly abroad.

Assuming then that

“ the making of a book is less than naught if the book made does not reform the people ”

anyone might reasonably ask him for what motive he has so diffusely insisted upon this doctrine, inasmuch as the books which “ reform the people ” in the space of a century or in a World are very, very few.

This he has done for various reasons, because he hopes that these doctrines may some day fall under the eyes of someone who may give them practical application ; because he holds that the class of Engineers should interest itself in social problems, especially in those which concern the production and distribution of wealth ; because the doctrines of Henry George have, through the work of the writer and for the first time, received a mathematical demonstration, and this with its procedure absolutely original ; but he has been pressed to write these articles also by another and stronger motive.

He is profoundly convinced of the great good which would accrue to our country from the application of this doctrine, and it is above all for this that, knowing himself not to be without intelligence and education, and having been able, through professional reasons, to study on the spot the economic life of other nations, he has held it to be his duty to expound them.

We shall not some day be asked to account for the good which we have not been able to obtain, but we shall be asked what we have done to obtain it !

To do all that we can for the triumph of truth and justice, this is the duty of the good citizen, and having fulfilled this his conscience is secure and tranquil, he can await events in peace, be they contrary or favourable to him, and if, as to Giuseppe Parini :

“ unfeeling mortals—turn their back upon him, he fights against evil—his constancy shield and armour, he is not cast down by grief, nor exalted by pride.”
