

Dinner to Ashley Mitchell

ASHLEY MITCHELL is Treasurer of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade organized at Copenhagen last summer. He was chairman of the Resolutions Committee at that conference. His home is in Huddersfield, Yorkshire, where he is a member of a firm long engaged in the manufacture of woolen goods. In political life he is a member of the Liberal Party and is at present standing as its candidate for Parliament. On his arrival in New York he was welcomed by a small delegation at the dock and a few days later started for Canada, visiting Montreal and Toronto.

On his return to New York he was tendered a dinner and reception at the Hotel Astor on March 16. The affair was notable for the enthusiasm that prevailed and the spirit aroused by Mr. Mitchell's fine presentation of his subject. The simplicity of his language, his insistence on the importance of the message we bring, the candor and fine feeling displayed by this almost youthful visitor to our shores, is an assurance that our cause in Great Britain is in safe hands. A practical business man, and Parliamentary candidate of a great party, he is convinced and asserts that the philosophy of Henry George in its fullness offers the only adequate solution for the grave social and economic problems that beset his country.

Our memory is taxed to recall the number of dinners at which Frederic C. Leubuscher has acted as toastmaster in the last thirty and more years. Graceful and efficient as ever, he presided at this dinner, and paid a fine tribute to Mr. Mitchell, and his work at Copenhagen. He told how many years ago Theodore Roosevelt, then a fellow member with Mr. Leubuscher of the Free Trade Club of this city, had passionately declared that he hoped to live to see "the abolition of every accursed custom house in the world." "A few years later," said the Toastmaster, "he took his seat as a protectionist president of the United States!"

Mrs. Anna George deMille commented with pleasant humor on her association with the guest of the evening in London and Copenhagen, and expressed her hope that on her next visit to England Mr. Mitchell would be able to entertain her within the precincts of the House of Commons.

Lawson Purdy referred to the housing situation in New York City and the encouragement which had been given the erection of new buildings by even the limited tax exemption which was granted by the legislature to help relieve the housing shortage. He drew attention to the amount of economic rent which was now collected by the City of New York toward its expenses by reason of the assessment of land at its full value. He pointed out that it was no longer profitable to hold land idle in this city for any extended period of time, and that this had been accomplished largely as a result of public sentiment created by Single Taxers.

SUMMARY OF MR. MITCHELL'S SPEECH

Mr. Mitchell began by extending to those present and all the friends in this country the greetings of his colleagues in Great Britain and in particular those of a man well known to many of those present, John Paul. He hoped that it would be possible for Mr. Paul to visit this country before the end of the present year.

He said that what had impressed him most during his short stay was a visit to the Tax Department of this city and his inspection of the tax books. In Great Britain one argument advanced against the Single Tax was that it was impossible to value land apart from improvements. He had now seen billions of land value set down for taxation apart from improvement value. Even though we put the same rate on improvements as on the land, nevertheless we were far ahead of Great Britain, where idle land paid no tax at all. Even in the city of London there were large areas of idle land valuable for building purposes, which were assessed on the basis of their rental for agricultural purposes, and in addition had three quarters of their taxes remitted by the Agricultural Relief Act!

He thought that our practice of assessing land at its full value had a great deal to do with our prosperity, because it was not profitable to hold land idle, and the high tax and valuation were powerful factors in persuading people to put their land to use. Henry George had said in "Progress and Poverty" that two effects could be anticipated from the application of the Single Tax, the destruction of land monopoly, and the encouragement of industry by relief from tax burdens. Mr. Mitchell was inclined to think that of the two the destruction of land monopoly and the consequent opening up of natural opportunities was much the more important, and that we in this country had failed to realize how far along we had got toward the Single Tax as compared with other countries where the tax on economic rent was negligible. Not only had we done much to mitigate the evils of land monopoly, but some of our communities were collecting for the public treasury large amounts of economic rent. Of course, a great deal of rent still remained in private hands and there were many oppressive taxes on industry, but nevertheless this country as compared with European countries was in an enviable fiscal position.

Mr. Mitchell then recited some of his experiences in campaigning for the cause in Great Britain during the twenty years since he became a convert to the philosophy of Henry George. Referring to the immediate political situation in Great Britain, he said free trade does not mean low tariffs but no tariffs at all, and the fight for free trade is not over schedules but whether a tariff is right or wrong. The argument which has carried the day in most cases is that if a government interferes with an individual's right to purchase any article which is in itself harmless, then that government is interfering with individual freedom.

In Great Britain even the Conservative Party is not united, for many of its members are against a protective tariff, and even that party may come around to free trade. The Labor Party has shown that in the main its tendency is toward socialism. In the Liberal Party are some who still cling to the idea of governmental help and supervision, but there is a large group who feel that the true policy is to open up the land and natural resources, establish real free trade and let the individual do the rest.

Mr. Mitchell asserted that the time had gone by when in progressive nations there should be any talk of Tory and Liberal. These terms belong to the past. The question in Great Britain at least was, not whether we shall stand still or progress, but in what direction shall we progress? Shall we proceed along the lines we are now going, of an evolutionary socialism, with all manner of restrictive and paternalistic laws and bureaucracies, or shall we have the minimum of governmental interference and supervision, so as to allow the maximum of individual initiative—in short, establish the philosophy of Henry George? For it is Henry George who has given us the only practical alternative to socialism.

Mr. Mitchell urged us not to stress our differences, but to work together on matters we are able to agree upon. The International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade is something on which we can all unite. He hoped that the International Union might be the means of calling attention of the League of Nations to what are the real barriers to world peace. The Union was now preparing to memorialize the Economic Section of the League which will meet in May. He urged us to help the International Union to spread our doctrines, not only with contributions but with our moral support, for lack of money is no bar to membership in the Union.

There is greater need for quick action than many people realize. Unless we take advantage of the experience of the late war the horror will recede into the distance, and, as has happened in the past, the next generation will be misled by the so-called glories and heroics of warfare.

On the conclusion of Mr. Mitchell's address the Toastmaster took occasion to say that if John Paul should visit this country he could be assured of a welcome that would gladden his heart and that he would know he was among friends.

The dinner was ended, but the time till nearly midnight was consumed with felicitations to our distinguished guest. The affair was a pronounced success, due in large measure to the assistance rendered by Miss Wolf who had given it her solicitous attention. Among the list of diners which follows the reader will note the name of Miss Mabel C. Weaks, of the New York Public Library, who prepared the catalogue of letters and manuscripts in the George Collection. Miss Weaks was a guest of Mrs. deMille, and was an interested listener.

Charles O'Connor Hennessy, president of the International Union, sent the following telegram from Florida.:

Express to Ashley Mitchell, and to my friends assembled to greet him, my great regret that circumstances must deny me the pleasure of joining personally in the welcome to him. Knowing his background, I greatly respect his growing influence among the Georgists of England, due to his character as a man, his devotion to ideals of economic freedom and his courage and commonsense as a practical politician. As one of the trusted lieutenants of John Paul, and particularly as treasurer of our International Union, he is entitled to our fullest confidence and support.

FROM JOHN J. MURPHY

It is with deep regret that I find myself compelled to be absent from the dinner to Mr. Ashley Mitchell. Only the necessity for my presence in Albany compels me to forego the pleasure, which I would have had in making his acquaintance, and expressing my appreciation of the work which he and his associates in Great Britain are doing, to bring about the triumph of social justice.

It would be a mere waste of time for me to emphasize to the group that has gathered together to honor Mr. Mitchell, the importance to humanity in general, of the recognition and adoption of those policies for which the International Union for the Taxation of Land Values and Free Trade stands. Never was there a time when public men were so prone as now, to offer tricks and devices to the people as means of extrication from the difficulties now besetting mankind, which are the consequences of failure to seek to know justice and do it.

I hope for a wide extension of the labors and activities of the International Union, and bespeak for it the active support of every person who claims to be a follower of Henry George.

FROM LOUIS F. POST

I greatly regret my inability to attend the dinner in honor of Ashley Mitchell of England on the 16th, but it is impossible for me to go. Let me express the hope that this recognition of Mr. Mitchell's service to the greatest of causes for the world's prosperity, greatest because it aims at prosperity for all in proportion to the usefulness of each, may be a worthy tribute to him and all his associates.

Letters of regret were read from Will Atkinson, Raymond V. Ingersoll, Mrs. Edith Hibbard and others.

LIST OF DINERS

Mr. and Mrs. Carl Banwart, G. Bassler, Mr. and Mrs. T. P. Beggs, Stephen Bell, Frank Bell, Gladwin Bouton, James R. Brown, H. S. Buttenheim, DeWitt Clinton, Miss Grace Colbron, Josiah Dadley, Mrs. Anna George deMille, Miss Agnes deMille, Miss Margaret deMille, Mrs. W. D. Donaldson, O. K. Dorn, Walter Fairchild, Mr. and Mrs. Nelson W. Gage, Oscar Geiger, Charles Hecht, H. A. Hellyer, Mr. and Mrs. Frank H. Hennessy, Mr. and Mrs. Chas. H. Ingersoll, Miss A. Kaufmann, E. J. James, Mr. and Mrs. F. C. Leubuscher, Herman Loew, Joseph McGuinness, Harvey Malcolm, Joseph Dana Miller, Ashley Mitchell, W. Montague Pearsall, A. C. Pleydell, Albert Pleydell, Edward Polak, Mr and Mrs. Chas. J. Post, Lawson Purdy, Miss Clara Rhoades, Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Robinson, Robert Scott, Jr., Mrs. Lilian Reid Shannon, Miss Charlotte O. Schetter, W. B. Vernam, Miss Mabel C. Weaks, Fred. M. Wolf, Miss Frances I. Wolf.