

AN AMERICAN LAND BOOM Florida and the Speculators

(By WILFRED WELLOCK in the DAILY HERALD,
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I am no magician ; but whilst in America I discovered two words which act like magic on the American mind, making it serious almost to the point of superstition, and revealing a startling capacity for getting to the bottom of the average American's pocket. Those two words are—Real Estate.

Within twenty-four hours of my leaving Liverpool, a very rich American (I forgot how rich he said he was) confidentially told me ordinary business was of no use. The way to make money to-day was to deal in Real Estate. Buying and selling land! Thousands and thousands of Americans, my informant assured me, were not only making a living by this means, but amassing huge fortunes. The explanation? Just this, that America's prosperity during recent years has so raised the value of much of her land that it is constantly changing hands at greatly enhanced prices.

In New York I frequently heard it said that everybody in America worth two dimes speculated in Real Estate. One man, on learning I intended to lecture on world labour and economic problems, tried to warn me off by saying the labour leaders of America had no use for such things. All their spare time was devoted to investing their loose money in Real Estate.

ALL ON REAL ESTATE

In the middle of December I spent a few days with some friends in North Carolina. I no sooner arrived there than I was informed that a land boom was in operation, run, I was told, by the same people who were running the big boom in Florida. Wherever one went one had Real Estate, sometimes hot, sometimes rather cool (where people had sold too soon), served up for breakfast, luncheon and supper.

At one house I visited, a land agent called whilst I was there and offered the occupier three times the amount for his farm that he had paid for it a short time before.

But this was a tame affair compared to the land boom in Florida, of which I saw something. My curiosity got the better of me. For weeks I had watched the boosting of Florida in the American Press. Fabulous sums are being spent on advertising, and once the boom was well under way the Press found it good copy.

During the past few months Florida has been besieged with investors from every part of the country. It was said that anyone who returned from Florida without a land-deed in his pocket, having run the gauntlet of the Real Estaters, was nothing less than a hero.

It appears that almost the entire State is being re-sold. The place was first bought up, as much of it as possible, by the financiers, who then began to unload it in parcels, chiefly for residential purposes. We boarded a charabanc at Jacksonville, and travelled south for 150 miles. Practically every inch of the road was parcelled out into lots.

FREE RIDES AND FEEDS

In some cases land under water, sheer swamp, was dotted with boards bearing the names of roads and avenues that were to be. New cities were rising up from the plain, with schools, churches, hotels, and golf courses, all taking shape. Yet not a soul dwelt in them! But parties were being brought daily by the agents, given a free ride and a free feed. They had my sympathy. These cities are the greatest works of faith I have seen for some time.

In Daytona quite half the shops on the long promenade

were occupied by Real Estaters, each agent having a large staff of "sellers on commission." And woe betide those who were lured into their luxurious interiors by tempting fruit and food such as could be grown in any back-garden on the estate such people were destined to be hitched to!

Will the boom succeed? Is America so prosperous that she can people Florida with an idle class that lives on interest? [Land gambling would be the more correct term.—ED., LAND & LIBERTY.]

And if so, what will be the moral outcome, and what will be the effect on the class war, the industrial struggle that looms in the distance? Of all the things I saw in America none gave me more food for reflection and questioning than the land boom of Florida.

H. H. SPENCER

We regret to announce the death of H. H. Spencer, of Bradford, which took place in London, 23rd February, following an operation. He was a firm believer in Henry George's teaching. In 1891 he visited Australia and settled there in business for a time. He became interested in the Land Values agitation, and at once took a leading part in the propaganda. His intellectual grasp of the underlying principle brought him to the study of economic problems, and in his independent examination he reached out to land monopoly as the main source of industrial strife and social discontent. His Australian friends and co-workers still recall with respect and admiration, the bold and uncompromising advocate they had in H. H. Spencer.

Ten years later, in 1901, he became a member of the Bradford Town Council. He won this contested election on the Land Values and immediately brought the question before the Council in the form of a resolution. In this way Bradford took its place among the municipalities demanding powers from Parliament to tax land values for local needs. Mr. Spencer was made a magistrate in 1918.

In 1906 he established the firm of Messrs. H. H. Spencer & Co., manufacturers of dress goods and linings, and in 1923 was appointed Secretary of the Parliamentary Association of British Chambers of Commerce.

An ardent Liberal he became a Member of Parliament for one of the Bradford Divisions, and his maiden speech on the Safeguarding of Industries Act was highly appreciated and widely commented upon as one of the coolest and clearest vindications of Free Trade, and which he himself described to the House as "a plain man's plea for my own trade and my own district."

Mr. Spencer as a business man and public spirited citizen had many interests outside the organized movement for Land Values Taxation, but his old associates in the movement can gladly and gratefully acknowledge what he was given to accomplish in the propaganda both in Australia and in England. In his family life he suffered the loss of two sons killed in the war and one, 20 years old, was killed in a mountaineering expedition in Canada. We extend to Mrs. Spencer our sincerest sympathy.

The Pantiya Rubber Company pays a dividend of 70 per cent. for the past year. It is stated that the costs of production have averaged 8.82d. per lb. of rubber, and the price realized on sale is 3s. 4.32d. per lb. This suggests that by far the greater part of the profits of the Company represents land values. If situated in Britain, the estates would be classed as agricultural land, and special privileges would be claimed on account of agricultural depression.