

THE HENRY GEORGE ANNIVERSARY IN AUSTRALIA.

SPEECH BY THE PREMIER OF NEW SOUTH WALES.

The members of the New South Wales Single Tax League met to celebrate the anniversary of Henry George's birth in the Sargent's Banquet Hall, Sydney, 4th September. There was a dinner to begin with, and afterwards a more public meeting. Mr. J. R. Firth presided at both gatherings.

The speech of the evening (reports the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*) was, of course, that of Mr. Carruthers. He had hurried away from Parliament to meet the engagement, and said he "thought his audience would pardon him if he confined himself to saying a few words of good cheer to them in the battle that they were engaged in, and were likely to be engaged in for many years—the battle of advocating the principles of land value taxation. (Cheers). A speech which he had delivered a couple of years ago, he said, clearly indicated the attitude he had always taken with regard to Henry George and his teachings.

"I know," Mr. Carruthers continued, "that the expression 'single taxer' is one that to many people carries with it something of an obnoxious character, and especially when we find that in the name of single tax there are so many things proposed to be done. I don't wonder that it is at times an unpopular cry on account of the mistakes which are associated with it in the minds of people."

As an example of his meaning, the Premier quoted the proposal of the Federal Labour Party for a progressive land tax in connection with Commonwealth taxation. "There is," he said, "nothing more calculated to mislead the people, who imagine that a progressive land tax based upon unimproved land value is part and parcel of the teachings of Henry George, or of a system of honest reform." Therefore, he argued, it was necessary for the Single Tax League to make it clear to the people what was really understood by the doctrines they held, and which they desired to see brought into practice as the national taxation of the people.

"I live now in the arena of performances," declared the Premier, "and I think I can safely claim that, having had the opportunity come to me to put into practice something that I believed in, I am not letting that opportunity go by without some performances. I am perfectly well aware that when I leave office I shall be open to the charge of not having given full effect to all my political doctrines. I do not suppose they will let me stop long enough to do it. But if I can claim that I have gone one step, and the country has gone with me, I can claim to have done something." That something, he then explained, was the establishment of a system of local government throughout a vast area of New South Wales—an area so vast as to make that which had previously been under local government quite insignificant, and the government had made the principle of rating of unimproved land value the basis of it. When this came into operation, and the people saw the benefits to be derived from it, there would be less reason, he thought, for the association to do propaganda work, for the system would be eloquent in favour of itself. Had they established a system of local self-government throughout the rural districts they would have had to court unpopularity, which would perhaps have stopped it being put into operation.

"What this country wants"—continued the Premier—"is that the lands shall be improved; in other words, that they shall be used in the sense that they shall become more valuable by reason of their greater production." He regretted that he could not see that the same basis which had been adopted for the establishment of local government would apply to the local Government extension; but it was far harder to write on a slate that was not clean than on one that was. Local government had been fairly successful so far as regards municipal government; they had to substitute a sound for an unsound system. The measure now before

the Assembly was one that provided for an option in the system of taxation in municipalities, and by the figures which had been collected it was made clear to a large majority of the municipalities that it would be to their advantage to accept the option of the taxation of unimproved values, and the difficulties of the minority could be overcome in the near future. So those two things might be pointed to as works of actual achievement. Taking the financial aspect of the local government question, he said that payment for services rendered should not be confused with payment for the machinery of Government, and when they looked at these things they would find that they were half-way to the goal for which they were striving. He had never gone back on his admiration and appreciation of Henry George and his teachings. The work the Single Tax League had to do was largely one of the advocating its views, educating the people, and bringing about the adoption of its views. "We have done much," he declared, "and the advance which has been shown is materially one of which the advocates of land value taxation should be proud."

Referring to land settlement at a latter stage of his speech, Mr. Carruthers said that during the last year there had been larger areas of land thrown open by the State and by private owners than there had been for 20 years past. Sub-division of land by the State and by private owners was going on apace.

In conclusion Mr. Carruthers said:—"The task which is before you is the same that was before Henry George, and the same that will be before others, 20, 50, or 100 years hence—that is the task of education, the task of paving the way so that every step in the road is paved, and may be taken with security and safety, and you have to congratulate yourselves that where the principles were unpopular years ago they are now being accepted with acclamation. That should be an encouragement to you to continue the work of education as you have done in the past, finding day by day more achievement and a brighter prospect ahead. It has been said that in dealing with local government the State should have abolished the land tax. It is not proposed to do that, but it is proposed to keep it in suspension. The machinery will be kept and the law remain intact, but the arrangement is made, as an encouragement to the local governing bodies, that when they make the tax a penny in the £ the penny in the £ collected by the State will be suspended. If they only go to one half-penny in the £ the State tax will remain. I should have opposed any scheme which would have undone the work that was done with so much difficulty, and with so much struggling, when Mr. Reid introduced the land tax. I am doing my best, step by step, to embody those sound principles upon the Statute-book of the State."

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