

BUE BJÖRNER

1902-1950



From Swanwick Conference Group

It is grief to have to report the death of Bue Björner. On 17 February he succumbed to the affliction which swiftly developed shortly before Christmas and had held him painfully bed-ridden since. He was a man of such outstanding character and ability, of so much force and influence, so warm-hearted and glad in all his endeavours, that not only his co-workers in the Henry George cause in Denmark and the world

beyond, but also the whole community of his fellow citizens, have reason to sorrow. For those of us in the British and the International Land Values and Free Trade movement, we can never forget the associations we had and the services he rendered—his presence at the International Conferences in London, 1936, New York, 1939, and Swanwick, 1949; the guidance he gave and the papers he presented; his presence also at the Matlock Bath Conferences—all those meetings richly enlightened and enlivened by his instruction and genial personality. He held a high place in the commercial and public life of his own country. For two years he had been in Parliament as one of the representatives of the Georgeist "Justice Party." He was head of the flourishing business that was founded by his father. Among his many interests and the posts entrusted to him were his presidency of the federation of hard-timber merchants, member of the Danish committee of the International Chamber of Commerce, committee member of the Merchant Company (in those capacities always an uncompromising advocate of Free Trade) and he was member of the Trade delegation to Moscow.

During the German occupation he was for his patriotism imprisoned. For the 1943 General Election he instigated the wearing of the badge "Have Voted," which became a striking demonstration of national solidity in the face of tyrants. From within the concentration camp he continued his courageous activity as teacher and preacher of the Henry George social philosophy.

The obituary notices in all the Copenhagen dailies honoured the ideals and achievements of this worthy citizen. In the Justice Party's journal, *Vejen Frem*, Dr. Viggo Starcke wrote in eloquent words the testimony of esteem and affection in which Bue was held, particularly by his most intimate associates—his captivating disposition, his inexhaustible energy despite the many duties he undertook, the magnificent use he made of the endowments born of his upbringing, so fortunate he was in having such a father and mother. "The way in which he met his destiny was an example for others. He was fully aware of what was happening, saying shortly before he died: 'It is a bit early to go, but I have had such a rich life and I have had as much out of it as any person can fairly expect.' It is only a brave man who can 'so speak.'"

Remarkable also was the tribute paid in the House of Parliament when proceedings were suspended and the President of the Chamber, Mr. Bomholt, made oration of which some words were: "Freedom was for Bue Björner the necessary condition both for the natural

development of individual faculties and for the progress and sweetness of social life. It was his conviction that the land-value-taxation principles would establish a state of greater harmony and greater advancement. He was quite a young man when first elected to the committee of the Henry George Union and he contributed much to the spread of the Henry George doctrine in our country. Here in Parliament and also in the wider arena of public affairs where he played his part, he impressed the stamp of his work and character. We lose an endearing and gracious colleague, a man distinguished by his width of vision, intensity of spirit and practical insight. We cherish the memory he has left with us."

The burial service was held on February 21 in Grundtvig's Church, conducted by Pastor A. Lund Sørensen, and attended by a great company representative of the Government and Parliament, business and trade associations, the Henry George Union and the Justice Party. Among the many wreaths was one from Prince Axel and in their wreath the International Union did homage from "Georgeists of the World." In the words of the Pastor there was laid to rest one who had devoted all his ability and strength to that which he believed was Truth and Justice.

In his 48th year, in the very prime of life, Bue has been sped from this scene. His companions in the cause for which he has so nobly striven, the deeply attached friends he made in all his comings and goings, mourners themselves, are yet grateful for the example he has shed. We in that company convey to the relatives profound sympathy in their bereavement—Caroline Björner, his wife, and her four children; his parents, the revered Georgeist veterans, J. L. and Signe Björner; Dan Björner, Bue's brother, and other members of the family all dedicated as Bue was to the truths their parents taught them.

A. W. MADSEN.

IN MEMORIAM

What a simply unbelievable tragedy for all of us that Bue Björner has passed. Caroline had also cabled me the sad news. Such spirits as Bue developed are all too few especially in this time of economic and political global crisis. His ideals will always give me inspiration as well as his great courage.

RUPERT MASON.

There is in Denmark, probably more than in any other country, a widespread understanding of the distinction between those things which rightly belong to the community as a whole, and those things which are rightfully the private property of individuals. With this understanding there goes appreciation of the far-reaching importance for the welfare of the nation of just laws of taxation.

To this end the various members of the Björner family have contributed much, and prominent among them was Bue Björner, whose early passing is felt as a grievous loss by his many friends, not only in his own beloved Denmark, but scattered through many countries of the globe.

Bue Björner was ever ready to make personal sacrifice to help forward the cause he had at heart, and many and long were the journeys he made for this reason. He contributed much and ably by voice and pen to the spread of Georgeist philosophy, but never without that "something in his heart" to which he wished to give expression.

At an International Conference in London in 1936 he was chosen President of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade, and he was presiding

at the 1939 International Conference in New York when war broke out. His homeward journey with Mrs. Björner was in consequence lengthy, tedious and full of anxiety.

When, during the Nazi occupation of Denmark, many prominent citizens were taken as hostages, he was among them. Even in internment, however, he was a Georgeist propagandist amongst his fellow hostages.

As recently as August, 1949, at the International Conference at Swanwick, he appeared to be in excellent health, and his occupation of the Presidential Chair was marked by his usual ability, dignity and humour.

He will be sorely missed by his colleagues in the Danish Parliament where, since the war, he has faithfully served his country and the cause of World Peace.

His many friends from overseas would wish to join those in his homeland in an affectionate tribute of honour and esteem to his memory, and in an expression of warmest sympathy to his widow and children.

AUSTIN H. PEAKE.

Your cabled news of Bue Björner's death came as a great shock. Certainly no one would have thought that Bue last August was other than a well man. I shall never forget his hearty laugh and how he led the singing of the Danish songs in the evenings; such vitality, such wit and humour. For me the memory of these and his many other qualities will be his enduring monument.

(MISS) V. G. PETERSON.

It seems almost impossible to think that the news can be true that Bue, who was in many ways the brightest soul at the Swanwick Conference could even then have been under the shadow of death. It is a tragedy that our cause which needs many more workers should lose one who has worked so nobly for it and was only now in middle life. Those of us who had the privilege of working with him can count ourselves fortunate. We shall find it hard to pay adequate tribute to his work and character. Think of how he came over to join us at Matlock on both occasions as well as of his great service

as President at Swanwick. He will be sadly missed and we shall be happy if we see his like again to instil such an example.

ASHLEY MITCHELL.

FROM CAROLINE BJÖRNER

A letter from Caroline Björner speaks of the extraordinary recognition of Bue and honour to his memory in the Danish newspapers, related in no fewer than 149 press cuttings. "I could not have dreamt," she writes, "that he was held in such high esteem and respect, the homage coming, too, in most remarkable degree from his political opponents." To the many friends who sent their sympathies—in more than 600 letters from near and far including also cables from Great Britain, U.S.A., Canada, Spain and many other countries—Mrs. Björner desires through our columns to convey this message until she may be able herself to write to each and all:—

"May I, on Bue's behalf and my own, thank all those very dear friends who wrote during my husband's illness and since his death. It was to him in those last days a great inspiration to know that so many friends thought of him in their concern for his health when they saw the report in *LAND & LIBERTY*. Since his death I have had such kindness and so many letters that I find it necessary to try to thank everybody in this way first."

The long, patient and anxious vigil is over and it told on the strength of her who watched. But she, now recovering, writes simply: "To have friendship in such overflowing measure—that must be a reminder to me of my duty to go forward with the work."

DANISH LOCAL ELECTIONS

On going to press we have the gratifying news that in the recent elections for the Local Government Councils, the Justice Party has gained 49 seats. We will give an account of this remarkable victory in our next issue. The success of the "Georgeists" (and so named) has been widely noticed in British and overseas newspapers.

THE PILGRIM FATHERS—A Lesson from History

The Foundation for Economic Education of Irvington-on-Hudson, New York, had the following interesting "Clipping of Note" in its Bulletin of August 15, 1949:—

In Governor Bradford's own history of the Plymouth Bay Colony over which he presided is a story that deserves to be far better known, particularly in an age that has acquired a mania for socialism and Communism and regards them as peculiarly "progressive" and entirely new, and is sure that they represent "the wave of the future."

Most of us have forgotten that when the Pilgrim Fathers landed on the shores of Massachusetts they established a Communist system. Out of their common product and storehouse they set up a system of rationing, though it came to "but a quarter of a pound of bread a day to each person." Even when harvest came, "it arose to but a little." A vicious circle seemed to set in. The people complained that they were too weak from want of food to tend the crops as they should. Deeply religious though they were, they took to stealing from each other. "So as it well appeared," writes Governor Bradford, "that famine must still insue the next year allso, if not some way prevented."

"So the colonists," he continues, "begane to thinke how they might raise as much corne as they could, and obtaine a beter croupe than they had done, that they might not still thus languish in miserie. At length (in 1623) after much debate of things, the Gov. (with the advise of the cheefest amongst them) gave way that they should set corne every man for his owne perticuler, and in that regard trust to them selves; in all other things to goe on in ye generall way as before. And so assigned to every family a parcell of land, according to the proportion of their number for that end, only for present use (*but made no devission for inheritance*) and ranged all boys and youth under some familie.

"This had very good success; for it made all hands very industrious, so as much more corne was planted than other waise would have bene by any means the Gov. or any other could use and saved him a great deall of trouble, and gave farr better contente.

"The women now wente willingly into the feild, and tooke their litle-ons with them to set corne, which before would aledg weakness, and inabilitie; whom to have compelled would have bene thought great tiranie and oppression.