

LESSONS OF TURGOT

By H.T.A. MCGAHAN (Matamata, New Zealand)

Turgot, the French Physiocrat, was the only single taxer to get his hands on power, during the regime of Louis XVI, and we can learn some lessons from him. Turgot wished to get government revenue through a land tax. But he also concerned himself with the reform of the government structure. Such reform is almost as important as the single tax itself. I have had thirty years experience in local government, have sat on intermediate bodies between the district and central government, and have served on a national body concerned with local government problems.

It is my belief that the central government should not be able to tax commodities or collect taxes directly from the taxpayer, as they do with income taxes. The central government should draw up its Budget for the year, then proceed to distribute it amongst the intermediate bodies, the states or provinces, and they in turn should add their provincial expenses and hand the combined sums for the district councils at the grass roots to collect from the taxpayer. Under such a system, only one form of taxation would be tolerated - what we call unimproved values. You could safely leave the district councils to collect it in any way they chose.

Most French historians that I am familiar with speak highly of Turgot and his efforts. Lord Macaulay, writing fifty years after the event, said that though he doubted whether anything that Louis XVI could have done would have averted the Revolution, he was sure that if there were such a course it was the one advocated by M. Turgot. Surely we should acquaint ourselves with the struggles of the only single taxer who had real power.

* * *