

At this testing time for France, it is fitting to recall the life and work of the man who founded the French League for Land-Value Taxation and Free Trade

A Georgeist Martyr

By DAVID K. MILLS

ON DECEMBER 28, 1943, Gestapo agents arrested a 56-year-old man in the town of Villeneuve-sur-Lot, near Toulouse, France. At the end of the war, friends were able to reconstruct his early movements from one internment camp to another, but the trace was eventually lost. He probably died, a prisoner of the Nazis, in the latter part of January, 1945.

The man was Sam Meyer, founder of the present Georgeist movements in France and Belgium and at one time a Vice-President of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade. Born at Mulhouse, in Alsace, in July, 1887, he came from an old Jewish family, but later became a free thinker. In 1897, the family moved to Brussels, and founded a business, les Magasins "A l'Innovation," which was ultimately to develop into a thriving chain of commercial stores. Sam Meyer went to Paris for university studies, and then entered the family business. In the World War of 1914-1918, he voluntarily joined the French army. Discharged on health grounds, he devoted his energies to refugee work. After the war, he returned to Brussels and his administrative job with "A l'Innovation." He was capable of extremely hard work, and proved very successful. It was in these post-war years that the business expanded so rapidly.

A deep humanitarian, Meyer was conscious of the social injustice around him, and found time to study economic and social questions. During his wide reading, he came across *Progress and Poverty* and the ideas of Henry George. Fired by this and subsequent study, he gathered and converted a group of friends, and in 1924 founded the Belgian League for Land Reform. In 1925 he moved to Paris, where he met Charles Gide (a professor of economics) and, through Gide, Monsieur A. Daudé-Bancel. With the encouragement of these two, Sam Meyer founded, in 1925, the French League of Land Reform. (To-day, this is known as the League for Land and Revenue Reform and for Free Trade, and M. Daudé-Bancel is the President). His skill and zeal as a propagandist and administrator were devoted to the Georgeist cause in many ways: he founded the periodical *La Terre* now *Terre et Liberté*, had *Progress and Poverty* and other works by Henry George translated into French and published, and wrote books and pamphlets on the land question himself. With Gide, Daudé-Bancel and others, he worked hard to convert people in high places to Georgeist thinking. Some headway was made in academic and legal circles, and in the co-operative movement, but his efforts left no practical mark on the French political parties. Individual politicians were influenced, however, but the attempt to enact land value legislation in the department of Seine, and the attempt in 1936 (when Vincent Auriol was Minister of Finance) to pass through

the French Parliament a bill giving local authorities the option to levy a tax of 1% on land value, were both unsuccessful.

At the outbreak of war in September, 1939, Meyer moved to Villeneuve-sur-Lot, where he took over the reins in the business of a friend who had been called up. On the collapse of France, he became one of the first organisers of the resistance movement, establishing a network throughout the department of Lot-et-Garonne with the help of the mayor of Laroque des Arcs. Although he helped others to escape the country into Spain, Sam Meyer refused to go himself. He paid no heed to the warnings of friends and even refused to go into hiding. Eventually, in December, 1943, as the result of the action of informers, the Gestapo arrested him and his wife Adrienne. They were taken first to Agen, then to Toulouse. Madame Meyer was released, but her husband was sent first to the concentration camp at Drancy and later to Birkenau, in Silesia. Set to work in the mines, the hard conditions broke his health but not his spirit. Survivors have testified to his courage in those days. He was transferred to lighter office work, but, although at the end of the war his widow and friends held out hope for his return, and thought for a time that he might have been taken to the U.S.S.R., it is now presumed that he died in German hands.

In his memory, a handsomely presented book (French text) of some fifty or so pages, called "In Memoriam: Sam Meyer," was published last summer. It presents a general survey of his life by those who knew him as businessman, Georgeist, resistance leader and inmate of the concentration camp.

Joseph Ariel, Israeli Minister in Brussels, tells how free thinker Meyer and Calvinist Gide came to work so hard for the Zionist organisation Keren Kayemeth in the inter-war years. It was because they saw in the small Jewish colonies in Palestine real hope for the establishment of societies based on common ownership of land and the co-operative principle.

The pages commemorate a noble figure. The personality emerges of a man whose Georgeism was the essential part of a deeper humanitarianism. Thoroughly understanding the ramifications of the land-value policy, he had no time himself for compromise or reservations, but nevertheless was tolerant of those who had not seen as clearly as he, and welcomed association with anyone of any views who was prepared to discuss economic questions seriously. Enthusiastic, conscientious, able, and hard working, Sam Meyer was the complete optimist, with a curious incapacity to acknowledge even the existence of evil. He was a man capable of "every sacrifice save that of his Faith in a better world."