

A Yorkshire Liberal Keeps Faith

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I WAS born in 1886 at Ossett, Yorkshire. My father was an officer of the Divisional Liberal Association and his father had taken an active part before him. It was not surprising, therefore, that at twenty I found myself honorary secretary of the Ossett Junior Liberal Association. As secretary I had to arrange lectures and this brought me into personal contact with many of the ardent politicians of that period. One of them who came to address us on Free Trade was Charles Smithson, a member of the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values. I walked with him to the railway station — there were no motor cars then — and he advised me to read *Protection or Free Trade?* by Henry George, and then *Progress and Poverty*. Fellow Georgeists will smile, knowing how *Protection or Free Trade?* would prepare me for *Progress and Poverty*. I needed no further convincing but I read with avidity one after another the books of Henry George, and when I read his speeches I could almost hear his voice.

I shall never cease to be thankful to Henry George and to Charles Smithson for enabling me to see how the Social Problem could be solved. By establishing natural justice, economic liberty could be added to political liberty; by taking the community-created value of land for the community, and reducing or abolishing the taxes that hinder production and limit consumption, the whole social picture could be transformed; land monopoly could be abolished and the earth, without which man cannot live, would be available on equal terms to all.

When I came to live in Huddersfield I found that the local junior Liberal association was a veritable hive of Georgeists. It was led by that enthusiastic radical John Archer who was assisted by a full-time speaker — Arthur Withy, a famous Georgeist from New Zealand. Speakers travelled all over the county of Yorkshire and beyond. In the two general elections of 1910 I must have spoken in almost all the divisions of the county. The land was the burning issue and Lloyd George had included a meagre land tax in the Budget of 1909. So incensed were the Tory Peers that they rejected the

Finance Bill — and then the battle was on. Although the proposals were mild and not really land-value taxes at all, there was a principle involved; for the first time a new valuation was required to separate the land value from the improvement value. I have heard Georgeists say that they would require more than a mere incentive tax to justify great sacrifice of effort, but in those elections the smallness of the tax was ignored; the principle was at stake; the whole country was on fire about it.

We had wonderful orators in that campaign, among whom were Francis Neilson, E. G. Hemmerde and the Lord Advocate for Scotland, Alexander Ure. Meetings were organised for them by the United Committee under the fine inspiration of John Paul and his assistant Arthur Madsen. At that time the country was fully sold on Land Value Taxation and Free Trade. When the Liberal Government was returned the Finance Bill was passed. Asquith, the Prime Minister, had promised to remedy the deficiencies and flaws in the Finance Act by the autumn of 1914 when the valuation would be ready. Unfortunately the war of 1914-18 intervened and at its end the Act was repealed. British politics were never the same again.

In 1908, I joined the committee of the Yorkshire Land Values League which had an active full-time secretary, Fred Skirrow, supported by such ardent spirits as Fred Adams, Jack Marston and P. V. Olver. Arthur Madsen came from South Africa to join John Paul in the office in London, and I never cease to marvel that my activity in the Movement actually covers the whole of the period that Arthur Madsen gave to the cause in London.

In 1921 I lost my first wife. Having no family, I threw myself more fully into active politics, and because I had no dependents I was able to make greater sacrifices. I had heard often of the great work of Cobden and Bright and when I discovered Cobden's statement: "You who shall free the land will do more for your country than we who have freed its trade," I felt that my generation was called upon to carry the message forward. So in 1923 I stood as Liberal candidate for the Scarborough and Whitby Division, and in a straight fight nearly succeeded. The

following year, 1924, there was a three-cornered fight and that spoilt our chance of success. In 1929 at the call of our Georgeist friends at Penistone, I fought the election there but without any real hope of success.

Then in 1931, when all parties combined against the Socialists, I was offered a nomination in a two-membered division in Scotland, with Tory support. As the Liberals also supported the Tory for the other seat, election was certain, but the Liberal leader had agreed to accept Protection if a commission reported that it was necessary, and I refused to be elected with the possibility of having to accept tariffs. I would have despised myself if I had been elected on such terms, for sound Liberals in other Scottish seats, e.g. James Scott and McKenzie Wood, were opposed and defeated by the Tories because they were known to be stalwart Free Traders.

In 1923 I was elected a member of the United Committee and in 1926 became Treasurer of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade when it was formally constituted at Copenhagen. I have had the joy of attending every conference except one—the first, which was held in Spain in 1914. John Paul gave a solemn pledge to Joseph Fels that he would never neglect the international side of the Movement and the foundation of the International Union was the consequence. Whatever sacrifice I may have made in any way for the Georgeist Movement has been amply repaid by the great friendships I have made both at home and abroad. I hope I may be able to attend the next International Conference in New York in 1964.

I re-married in 1934 and thought that my political campaigns were ended, but I had become too well known and was prevailed upon to stand at Halifax. There was little chance of being elected; it was just a case of keeping the subject to the fore. In 1945 some friends at Batley persuaded me to stand for election there. After that I really did think that I had finished with elections but in 1955 Georgeist friends would have me fight at Keighley. Although always beaten, I never lost a deposit even when Liberals were losing them wholesale. I attribute this to the fact that I proclaimed my faith in free trade and the abolition of land monopoly.

Progress towards the establishment of social justice can be achieved only by political action, so it is essential that Georgeists take part in politics. After the first world war, the political parties in Britain were in a state of confusion. Many of our friends, like Wedgwood and Douglas, joined the Labour Party, and I was invited to go with them. I replied that though I wished them every success, I could not follow them because I wholly rejected the philosophy of socialism on which the Labour Party is based. I knew that it would always prefer state control to freedom. That indeed proved to be the case, for when the Labour Party secured a clear majority in Parliament in 1945 they brought in the Town and Country Planning Act instead of Land Value Taxation. I felt it was my duty to work in the Liberal Party, and to do all I could to keep it true to its philosophy of freedom.

During the inter-war period Lloyd George brought out a policy that really meant the nationalisation of rural land and the limitation of the taxation of land values to the towns, so that when Philip Snowden, in the 1931 minority Labour Government, brought in a Land Value Tax he had to make his proposals acceptable to the Liberal Party. The Snowden tax was swept away by the Tories in 1934, and the Labour Government of 1945 failed to take up the task again, to the sorrow of our friends in that party.

In 1944 the Liberal Party accepted the *Uthwatt Report* and gave full support to the Labour Party's 1947 Town and Country Planning Act. It was clear then that Georgeist Liberals were out in the cold and would soon cease to take any interest in politics unless a body was formed to keep them together. A number of us, the late Atholl Robertson, Wilfrid Harrison, Charles Batty, Stephen Martin and Frank Dupuis, got together and with the invaluable help of Arthur Madsen, formed the Liberal Liberty League as a pressure group inside the party. It was not long before those who opposed us in the Liberal Party got the rules altered so that we could not be affiliated to the Party. After some time the Liberal Liberty League was amalgamated with the Land Value Taxation League. It is true to say that as the result of constant work within the Liberal Party there are many members who strongly support Land Value Taxation and Rating and the Party cannot remove the policy from its programme without losing a great number of very active adherents.

In the days of Cobden and Peel, the parties which claimed to be progressive were out to remove controls and oppression and to widen the scope of liberty. Now, mainly as a result of restrictions and controls which sprung from the two world wars, state control has become firmly established and politicians think that controls and regulations can solve everything. The contrary is the case, for with a planned economy not only do our basic social problems remain unsolved, but the state economic planning itself gives rise to further problems.

If only the Liberal leaders today could realise that the liberty of the individual and real social justice are wholly compatible and indivisible they would turn away from the semi-socialist policies of the state-planned economy to the really radical policies of Henry George whose proposals go far deeper than the mere establishment of a new source of government revenue.

Expensive Space — (2)

The site of 14—18 Copthall Avenue, in the City of London, which is 2,900 square feet, was sold on November 20 for £312,000. This works out at £107 a square foot or £4,661,000 an acre. At this rate the value of the one square mile of the City of London works out at £3,000 million.