

A VISIT TO DENMARK

By A. H. Peake

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A. H. PEAKE

The occasion was the Third International Conference to promote the Taxation of Land Values and Free Trade.

The Danish Government had placed at the disposal of the Conference convenient, commodious and magnificent accommodation within the Danish Houses of Parliament, Copenhagen.

I don't suppose there are more than half a dozen Governments in all Europe that would have so treated us! And here is a typical incident: a uniformed attendant showing sightseers round the buildings, and discovering a tired foreigner seeking solitary repose on the broad benches of the Upper House, simply put his finger to his lips and led the visitors away in silence.

A considerable portion of the American and British contingent of the Conference travelled together *via* London and Harwich on 17th July. The sea was extraordinarily kind, and it was difficult to realize that a short ten years ago these peaceful waters were the scene of the greatest naval battle ever fought.

On arrival at Esbjerg, the Danish port that has sprung into being to supply this country with butter and bacon, Danish disciples of Henry George are on the quay to welcome us, to assist us over any language difficulties, and to escort us to our hotels for the night. Within a very short time we are meeting, round the supper table, more new friends who will travel with us across Denmark to the capital, also others who have come to bid us welcome and Godspeed, and the announcement is made that the municipality of Esbjerg has just decided by a unanimous vote, to take the utmost advantage of a new Act of the Danish Parliament. This Act permits local authorities to raise a portion of their revenues by a tax on land values. This is a good omen.

The day-long journey across to Copenhagen passes very quickly in congenial company. Once more, or rather twice, we have calm water to cross. The Little Belt only takes some twenty minutes, but the Great Belt crossing is closely comparable in distance with that from Folkestone to Boulogne. Some through carriages travel with us on the boats; not sufficient

to hold our now large party, but at any rate we have no trouble with the transshipment of luggage. Here again our travel arrangements are made easier for us because we have friends in authority, able and willing to act at short notice.

Everywhere as we pass we see the neat little home-steads, the older ones thatched, the newer ones white with red tiled roofs, each with its own outbuildings, whose size shows at once to the experienced eye the acreage of the farm. The fenceless fields with their multi-coloured crops clothe the gentle hills as with a patchwork quilt, and practically every farm has its line of tethered dairy cattle. The whole forms a picture of peaceful, happy homes. Mortgages, let it be remarked, are not visible from the train!

However, in Denmark, as elsewhere, fluctuations in currency value have enriched one section of the community at the expense of another, and the recent stabilization of the Danish crown on a gold standard has gone hardly with those who bought and built on loan a few years ago when the value of the crown was far less. The butter yield of three cows, when sold in England, only realizes now in Danish money as much as would that of two cows but a short while ago. We visitors are soon to learn this to our cost, for the internal prices of everything have not yet had time to be adjusted to the new money values.

Here at last is Copenhagen, and the full gathering of the Conference from the four corners of the earth: representatives of twenty nations meet in a common bond of brotherhood, for we aim not at legislation in favour of any section, class or nation, but our goal is simple justice for all men of all nations.

If any reader would understand more fully the spirit that unites us, let him read that masterpiece of economist literature, *Progress and Poverty*, by Henry George, the great prophet of this movement for the economic emancipation of mankind.

Our meeting is a League of Nations in miniature, and Germany, with its 22 representatives, is a full member on the same terms as any other nation.

Our cause, the taxation of land values—justice the end, taxation the means—is thrusting its roots deeply into the earth from China to Peru.

From the United States we hear of the Georgeist enclaves: townships that for over a quarter of a century, as far as is possible within the constitution of the U.S., have lived up to the motto, "We would take for the community for its use, that which rightly belongs to the community, the land value created by the community, and would leave sacred to the individual that which belongs to the individual."

We learn from Hungary that actual experience has shown how much easier it is to value land than any other subject of taxation; for land is out-of-doors, cannot be hid, can be accurately surveyed, and the correct grading of value according to site can be shown publicly on large scale maps.

Progress is reported from some portions of the British Empire, but, alas! not from all. An enlightened administration in a large area of the Malay Peninsula has retained native rights in the soil, and within a generation a whole population of primitive jungle tribes has attained to an advanced and prosperous civilization.

On the other hand, the modern history of Kenya Colony should make all Britons hang their heads with shame, for here the natives are gradually being deprived of their land, in order to compel them to work for such wages as seem to their white employers to be adequate. This process is called inculcating habits of industry and thrift, and the benefits of civilization are thus supposed to be conferred. It is the same old story that

has been so often repeated in the history of many lands, including our own.

From South Africa there is more welcome news. Cambridge has followed the example of Sydney, Australia, and now raises practically the whole of her municipal revenue from land value taxation. Here is a lesson for the elder Cambridge, in England, Europe.

However, for Great Britain the lesson that lies nearest home is in the progress of Denmark itself. The attention of the British electorate has been directed to Danish agricultural methods, organization and marketing of produce. Little mention, however, has been made of the political enlightenment of the Danish peasantry and land workers, and here is a portent that politicians of all parties would do well to ponder: The farmers and smallholders are among the strongest advocates of land value taxation.

One reason for the choice of the date of the Conference was that there might be joint meetings with the assembly of delegates of "Housemen" (the Danish peasant proprietors) from the island of Zealand.

It was good to be present at their annual meeting and to hear their chairman declare that they had won a small measure of land value taxation, and they meant to have more. The speech was translated into English by Jacob Lange, who might be described as the father of the Danish movement, for he it was who translated *Progress and Poverty* into Danish. It was most fitting that he should have been interpreting that day, for on the platform was the daughter of Henry George. The keynote of her speech was that in the fight for the taxation of land values, "Denmark is as a city set on a hill; for God's sake keep on with your work." The peasants then sang again their Land Song, while tears glistened on many a sunburnt, honest face, for they knew they were in the van of a great world campaign to restore to the people their rights in the land.

The joint meeting was then continued in a great open-air demonstration round the Monument of Liberty, which in the Danish capital occupies a central position corresponding to our Trafalgar Square. A brilliant scene it was in the bright sunshine, with the flags of 17 nations gracefully grouped round the monument, and borne by lady members of the International Conference, while speeches were delivered by members of the American Senate, and the Danish, British and German Houses of Parliament.

Excursions during the Conference, and afterwards a week's tour through Denmark for a smaller party by boat, motor and train, gave useful opportunities for becoming more intimate with the life of the country. Visits to ancient castles and beautiful cathedrals were sandwiched with inspection of smallholdings, farms and large estates. Kronborg Castle, at Elsinore, linked with the name of Hamlet; Copenhagen itself with its wonderful works of art and its fine public buildings, with their copper roofs bright green in tint; the joyous singing of peasants in their public meeting in Lellinges woods; the open-air theatre on the steep slopes of Dyreshaven amid the clustering beeches; these, with many other scenes of fiord and forest, all come back to memory.

Those who wished could see the co-operative "swine slaughteries," where humanely and expeditiously pigs were turned into pork, and all unwittingly visitors converted into vegetarians.

The co-operative dairies were pleasanter far, and amid the cream, butter and cheese, cooling drinks were available. But it is impossible to have lots of milk without lots of calves, and what is to be done with them all? Here is a problem for the newly converted vegetarians.

The farmer in Denmark spends scarcely any time in

selling his produce. All his pigs go to his co-operative society; these societies are organized for selling as well as buying, and are the large exporters of butter and bacon.

The farmer receives payment for his milk entirely on the basis of butter yield, and knows exactly the annual yield of each of his cows—500 lbs. of butter per annum per cow seems to be a good average.

Everywhere we were most heartily welcomed, and shown through the houses and round the farms.

Towards the north of Jutland the wastes of heather-covered land are being reclaimed at the rate of several thousand acres a year, by means of fire, chalk marl and fallowing. Those who knew this countryside a generation ago say they find it impossible to recognize it again now, covered as it is with farms and crops. Proud and happy is the farmer to show his fine field of oats, growing right alongside the heather.

An extensive area of Jutland is partially supplied with electricity from a hydro-electric power station, which derives its power from a 33 ft. fall obtained from a large artificial lake formed in the bed of Denmark's largest river. Leaks of water through the dam, at first a source of trouble, are now a source of profit, for advantage has been taken of the situation to found an industry which is as remunerative as the sale of electrical energy, namely, a salmon hatchery.

If there wasn't such a word, well, there is now! Dictionary makers, please note.

I don't know whether there is a Henry George Club or Land Value Taxation League in every town in Denmark, but we found one in every town we visited, and in each case a public meeting had been arranged. These were all well attended, and some were quite large gatherings, even when held some distance from the centres of population.

We had most efficient interpreters, or interrupters, as some of the speakers felt inclined to call them; but it was no uncommon thing to find oneself next a smallholder who was following with critical interest both speech and translation.

It is, of course, impossible for a foreigner within the space of a fortnight to get more than a glimpse into the life of a country. Perhaps when one meets so many Danes whose views on politics so closely resemble his own, it is only natural to be greatly impressed by their commonsense and political enlightenment!

One wonders how much of all this is due to the peasant adult high schools, which, with their masters much travelled in the realms of gold, are such a feature of Denmark. Are they a cause, or an effect, or are they both cause and effect?

In any case one must admire the sturdy peasantry who ask from their Government neither privilege nor favour, but only fair play. "Whether," they say,

THE LATEST LESSON FROM DENMARK

Land Value Taxation in Town and Country alike

A second edition of this informing leaflet has now been published by the United Committee. It relates the progress Denmark has made in carrying forward the land value policy and in particular explains the recent Danish Act (March 31st, 1926) for Local Land Value Taxation in *Town and Country alike*. Just the thing for distribution at meetings, from house to house and in other ways.

In Quantities
Price 1s. 6d. Carriage Paid

"the small farm or the large farm is to survive, or whether both shall exist side by side, let the case be decided on its pure economic merits in free and open competition. Cause no man to be fined and taxed on his own improvements, but let the Government take in taxation that which rightly belongs to the whole community, the unimproved value of the land."

It seems sometimes as if the great defect in the philosophy associated with the name of Henry George, is that it is not sufficiently complicated for educated minds to be able to grasp it!

As we sail toward the sunset and think of the homeland to which we are returning, and over which there hangs the dark cloud of industrial strife, memory recalls the little homily we heard from the lips of the Secretary of the Smallholders' Association in Odense—the home of Hans Andersen.

He spoke of the healing of the unemployment disease throughout the world, and the opening up of opportunities for labour everywhere by getting rid of land monopoly; of the raising of the standard of industrial wages that follows, when, beginning with agriculture, the labourer has an opportunity of becoming a farmer on fair terms, and when oppressive taxation is abolished.

He compared this natural method of securing a wage standard by just laws, with the strike method, in which success is only won by force, and held—sometimes—by force.

Why is it that in England, with a better climate and a more naturally fertile soil than in Denmark, the agricultural labourer's wage is a mere pittance, and poverty still exists amidst the possibility of plenty?

"We have farm land, and summer, and sunshine enough,

If we only have freedom and justice enough."*

Mr. Rupert East, in his impressions on Denmark, appearing in the *Bucks Herald*, 28th August, writes:—

"It is a striking fact that for two generations agriculture has not been hampered by Protective duties, and the latest movement is towards removing the hampering rate and tax burdens on their improvements and placing the same on the site values of their land. This change in legislation is being watched by political economists all over the world, especially as it comes from a nation of 'peasant proprietors,' and is unlike similar experiments in other parts of the world, as it applies generally over town and country alike. Mr. East's informing statement was prefaced by an editorial comment to the effect that he has for many years been a keen student and exponent of the Land Value policy.

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The salient facts of the Copenhagen Conference were pleasantly placed as a "current topic" in the *Scottish Farmer*, 2nd October, and readers interested were enjoined to a careful perusal of the September issue of *Land & Liberty*. In the open field of political adventure the editor of the *Scottish Farmer* stands fearlessly for independence and fair play, as some of our press writers can gratefully acknowledge. He ought to visit Denmark and learn at first hand how Land Value Taxation is associated with its agricultural enterprise and prosperity.

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Mr. R. L. Capell, of Northampton, writing to wish best success for the efforts of *Land & Liberty*, sends cuttings from the *East Africa Standard* with informing letters on Taxation of Land Values contributed by his daughter, now resident in East Africa.

* From Mr. P. Larsen's verses of greeting read at the opening meeting of the Conference.

FREDERIC C. LEUBUSCHER, B.A., LL.B.



The Copenhagen Conference, apart from its mission, will be gratefully remembered by those present for its many useful and inspiring issues. One man, Fred. C. Leubuscher, had come from New York to Copenhagen who, taking a foremost part in the proceedings as an able exponent of our case and contributing the brilliant paper printed in our issue of last month, made a definite purpose his special concern. The idea was to form an international organization on the basis of the Conference platform—Land Value Taxation and Free Trade. He and the President, Charles O'Connor Hennessy, earnestly discussed the project as they journeyed together across the Atlantic to Denmark. It found a prominent place in the Presidential Address, was brought before the Resolutions Committee by Fred. C. Leubuscher, and on his proposition was adopted by the Conference.

Mr. Leubuscher bears an honoured name in our ranks. He was with Henry George in his first Mayoralty campaign in 1886, and since those eventful and memorable days has been a standard bearer in the fight for economic justice. His name is once more indelibly associated with a landmark in the progress of the cause. May his zeal and enthusiasm for our International Union be fully justified.

In a speech at Washington, 27th October, President Coolidge declared "the keynote of the present prosperity is high wages and moderate profits. The American scale of wages is the main support of the home market."

"Where wages are high," says Henry George, "there will be the brain best guide the hand."

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Addressing a meeting at Merionethshire, on a non-political occasion, 29th October, Mr. Lloyd George urged that neither the barriers of poverty nor the stupidity and indolence of parents should be allowed to stand between the child and the best education the Country could afford: "Having to overcome these barriers," he said, "was more important than the land question." This reminds us of Dr. Dundas White's remark at a land value demonstration at Cardiff in 1913—that he "would bank on the man with access to land and no education as against him who had the education and no land."