

Lange and the Danish Folk Schools

By DR. S. VERE PEARSON

[Dr. Pearson writes from Norfolk, England, under date of June 3: "I did not know until this week when I was reading your last (March-April) issue that Jakob Lange was dead. I am enclosing herewith an article I wrote about him some sixteen years ago, just after the Copenhagen Conference (sponsored by the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade). It gives a little information about the Folk High Schools of Denmark. Jakob Lange was a grand man. I am sorry he is no more. But he had attained a fairly ripe age and had accomplished a great deal in his lifetime." The article sent to us by Dr. Pearson and presented here with some revisions, appeared in the August 21, 1926, issue of *The Commonwealth*, Georgeist paper edited by J. W. Graham Peace.—Ed.]

JAKOB LANGE holds the position of chief of one of the most important High Schools for smallholders in Denmark, the Funen Housemen's School in Odense. He has been guide, philosopher and friend there for years to a succession of adult agriculturists. As with other Danish Folk Schools, the husbandmen and women take a four- to six-months' course there when they are about twenty-five years of age. The women come in summer and the men in winter. They don't practice agriculture; that they have already done. But about two-thirds of their time is taken up in studying agricultural theory and practice. This means receiving instruction about such things and discussing them.

Lange, like that great predecessor of his, Grundtvig, the founder of the People's High Schools, believes in the spoken word. The power of "the living word," from the lips of one who gives impetus to spoken words by a lively mind behind them, and the importance of as complete personal and civic freedom as possible, were features which Grundtvig always impressed upon his followers; and Lange exemplifies these teachings finely. It is interesting to know that Grundtvig, who founded the first People's High School in Denmark in 1854, learned to value these things highly through visiting England in 1829-31. A characteristic saying from Lange is: "When the teacher has gone away the scholars talk the more; and if they don't the lesson has not been much good." The watchwords are "freedom" and "do things for yourselves."

Regarding the establishment of the School, Lange pointed out that he did not build it, nor a philanthropist, nor the State, nor the Municipality, but it was built by the smallholders themselves. Hence its success.

As for the teaching, much instruction, as has already been said, is given in matters agricultural. It is not so much instruction which is undertaken as studying and discussion pertaining to the best breeding and feeding of all kinds of stock, the soundest way to grow good crops and to market them, the methods of keeping farm accounts, etc. Beyond all that, a wide culture is instilled. Says Lange: "I don't need to teach them cooperation. They know that. I teach them all the 'isms.' I even teach them Protection. But I seldom convert any one to that 'ism'!"

Although the School gets a certain amount of State subsidy, the pupils pay for themselves a greater part of their expenses, and Government interference and regulation is not imposed. It would not be tolerated in freedom-loving, democratic Denmark. The rule is to find a good man to be at the head of such a School and then to leave him alone. "I can be a red-hot Communist (but I'm not), and no one would say anything." An inspector comes occasionally, but cannot interfere with the curriculum or teaching. All he has to do is to testify to the existence of the School, the scholars, and that teaching of some sort is being regularly carried on.

Lange's influence helps to counteract the wave of Socialism which is passing through Europe and which permeates most parties in most countries. The Social Democrats in Denmark are, like Conservatives, Liberals and Labor in other countries, doing great things at the expense of the taxpayers. But taxeaters and poor persist side by side. The bureaucrats don't, and can't eradicate poverty. The politicians are constantly promising favors to the people which cost money. Therefore they cannot preach abolition of taxes. But Lange does, and he preaches individualism. Banish monopoly in land and let men be free to produce for themselves. "At present," he says, "wages are settled by organization. But what is settled by

might is not settled by justice. When the lifting of land monopoly has brought economic emancipation wages can be settled by justice. Collect land-value rents [ground dues, as the Danes call them; something due to the community—S.V.P.], then rural and town dwellers will be combined."

Lange's influence for economic emancipation has been wielded by his pen not only through his having translated "Progress and Poverty," but also through his writing a small text-book dealing with the fundamentals of economics. This has been widely used in the many smallholders' schools. The influence of this book is difficult to measure. But consider the effect of a vast number of all the agricultural workers in the land becoming acquainted with a knowledge of the problems underlying taxation, property and land-holding; and one can then judge something of that influence. Would that we had a Jakob Lange in England, and a people there well enough educated to welcome such a revolution in the mental training of the younger generation!