

## LAND MONOPOLY, WAR AND PUBLIC DEBTS

### ADDRESS BY DR. S. VERE PEARSON

The CHAIRMAN, introducing Dr. S. Vere Pearson, said that he had been fortunate in attending a meeting of the Henry George Club in London where the speaker had ably dealt with the question he was about to bring before them.

Dr. S. VERE PEARSON referred the audience to Henry George's *SOCIAL PROBLEMS*, chapter xvi., where they would find the gist of his remarks. He said the public purse was poorly filled because, as they all recognized, the public revenue, land rent, was not collected. This led to theft from the individual and that increased the poverty already created. Beyond this, the public monies were grossly misspent in bureaucratic efforts at palliating the present evil social system. Further, there was the great misspending of public money in the nations' central coffers upon war. The United Kingdom spent in the six years subsequent to July, 1914, as much as had been spent in the 2½ preceding centuries, making no allowance for the alteration in the value of money; and this was nearly all spent on war. Since the days of the Revolution England had spent 85 per cent of her national income upon wars, their preparation and results. From August, 1914, to March, 1920, eleven thousand millions were spent, and of this 36 per cent was raised by taxation and 64 per cent by loans. It had to be remembered that during the war huge organizations were set up to popularize the idea of putting small amounts into the War Loan; and when one came to examine into the details, one found that even a year or two ago only one-twenty-seventh of the total debt was held by those who held small amounts in it, and probably the proportion is now smaller still. It must be remembered, too, that those holding smallish amounts in the public funds practically always paid out annually much more in taxation than they received by way of interest.

What was the foundation for the "credit" which enabled a few to put large sums into the public loan? It could be shown, he thought, that this was largely the result of land monopoly. Those who held the land values enriched themselves further by loan-mongering. Friends from America could tell them how interlocked were the interests of the Standard Oil Company and the great Pierpoint Morgan money lending interests. Even the great Banking combines in England held much of the land value in the country. Probably it was correct to say that more than one-third of the value of their loans on property was land value, and these should include advances on debentures of many companies.

Mr. Bertrand Russell had stated recently in one of his writings: "The Anglo-Japanese Alliance enabled Japan to absorb Manchuria and Shantung." This was quite an inaccurate statement. It would not even be true to say that the Japanese absorbed Manchuria and Shantung, because as a fact it was only a few of the Japanese who got hold of the rich natural resources in these countries. Again, in an editorial in *FOREIGN AFFAIRS* a few months ago (November, 1921), one could read the following: "Poland obtains German mines and German coal which French capital will finance." The truth was that the ownership of mines and coal had been transferred from some German individuals to some Polish individuals who had to be financed with loans from some French individuals.

Time did not permit him to do more than make a list of one or two other places in the Globe where public borrowing was associated with land monopoly. First of all, let them look to Ireland. There the British Government had created public debts to entrench private land proprietorship. Strife would not cease in Ireland under such circumstances. He recommended his hearers to read an excellent book in this connection written by a worker in their midst who wrote under the pseudonym of "Dalta," called *AN IRISH COMMONWEALTH*.

Canada had been referred to on the previous day. Corrupt practices had led to public borrowing to build roads, etc., to boost up land values, some of the proceeds of which went into private pockets. Not long ago he had investigated carefully the finances of the transference of some Waterworks at Norwich from private hands to the Corporation, by means of issuing a Corporation Stock. Landowners of a peculiar sort became disguised as bondholders, because undoubtedly much of the value paid for was land value.

The immortal Shakespeare showed how clear was his vision in this as in most other matters, for in his great play about war, "King Henry V.," in the first few lines he points out how the private appropriation of land at home led people to stir up wars of aggression abroad. He depicts the dignitaries of the Church doing this. They feared that a Bill to take from the Established Church some of their land rent was about to pass, and the Archbishop of Canterbury says:—

"If it pass against us,  
We lose the better half of our possession:  
For all the temporal lands, which men devout  
By testament have given to the Church,  
Would they strip from us;"

It was a first duty of the followers of Henry George in the cause of internationalism to recognize that they must strive each in his own country to get a recognition of the rights of man to life and therefore to the land from which sustenance came. He would give an apt quotation as to this from *THE PROBLEM OF WAR AND ITS SOLUTION*, written by his friend John E. Grant. He advised all to read this book, in which (p. 381) was to be found the following passage: "The basis of Peace is justice, and no nation that has not annexed its own country, thus becoming a Sovereign People, may hope to find peace. So soon as a nation respects its own rights it begins to respect the rights of others. Landless nations, oppressed with an increasing burden of ills, are filled with envy, hatred, and malice. . . . Leagues of such nations inevitably become leagues of pickpockets, liars, bandits and cut-throats. First there must be a reign of Justice which will bring about a profusion of Goods."

## DISCUSSION

Mr. A. H. WELLER (Manchester) said all Single Taxers would accept Mr. Verinder's definition of the moral basis of private property, but he wondered what would be the attitude of the Conference of Christian Churches next year. Would the legalised iniquity of private property in land be challenged? One of the representatives of the great landowning families, Lord Hugh Cecil, seemed to anticipate such a challenge, and had taken the precaution to state the landlord's point of view. Speaking at a Conservative Summer School at Wilton, Lord Hugh—who was a representative churchman as well as a landlord—said he did not agree with the assumption in the Land Song, that "God gave the land to the people." He believed that God created the material world and human nature, and endowed human nature with the instincts of acquisition and possession. That constituted the moral right and basis of property. Perhaps that might be described as the landlords' theology; it was a very old one and had many adherents. It was accepted and practised by the

slave-dealer, the landowner, the burglar and the pick-pocket, all of whom gave free play to their acquisitive and possessive instincts in their various ways. But it was a dangerous kind of morality for the landowners to preach, because if it were generally accepted, it would justify their immediate expropriation by violence or by any other method. Certainly in one respect the landowners had set a good example; when they acquired the land no compensation was paid to those who were dispossessed. But there was no need for them to be alarmed because when the people had acquired their native land they would be able to display to the new proletariat those Christian virtues of goodwill and kindness which Lord Hugh Cecil said were intended to make good the inequalities of life. Lord Hugh was only one of several landowners who had been making indiscreet speeches recently. These people were doing very effectively an important part of the land reformers' work; they were exposing to public view the true character of landlordism. In the speaker's opinion they deserved the best thanks of the Conference.