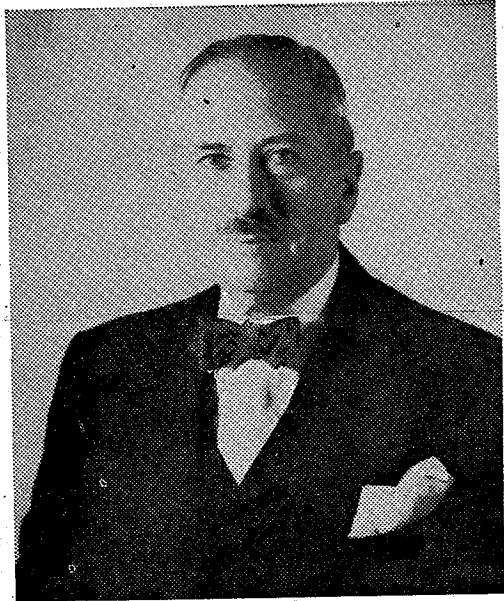


International Conference Review

—V. G. PETERSON



J. Rupert Mason

BY UNANIMOUS vote, J. Rupert Mason of San Francisco became the fourth president of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade at a meeting held on Saturday morning, August 20, 1949, at the end of the week-long conference at The Hayes, near Swanwick, Derbyshire, England. Mr. Mason is the union's second president to be chosen from the United States and succeeds E. J. Craigie of South Australia. Other presidents have been Charles O'Connor Hennessy of New York and Bue Bjerne of Copenhagen.

The conference which elected Mr. Mason was the seventh international gathering to be held under the auspices of the International Union. Of the many hundreds of enrolled members, one hundred and eighty, representing twelve countries, journeyed to Swanwick for the much heralded event. Denmark was most numerously represented, with a delegation of eleven. Present from the United States were Margaret Bateman, Ann Ross, John Gray, Robert Clancy, J. Rupert Mason and myself.

Bue Bjerne, who acted as president of the conference in the absence of E. J. Craigie, called the members together for their first session on Sunday evening, August 14th. Thereafter, meetings were held daily at 9:30 and

11:30 A. M., and at 2:30, 4:30 and 8 P. M. This rather strenuous program — which left little time for members to wander through the picturesque gardens surrounding The Hayes, a grey stone, many gabled mansion, was possible only because meals and lodgings were provided on the premises. For one week, The Hayes was a Georgist world, and conference members made the most of it.

As is usual, the opening session was devoted to appointing committees and setting up the mechanics required for the smooth running of the conference. The first main session was left to the following day when messages and papers from absent members including Hon. K. K. Steincke, Chairman of the Danish Upper House of Parliament and E. J. Craigie, ex-M. P., South Australia, were read. Later Mr. Bjerne delivered his Presidential Address, entitled, "Can International Trade Problems be Solved Internationally?" "Is there really anybody who believes that further state control and further planned economy will put a country back on a competitive basis?" Mr. Bjerne demanded, continuing, "the spirit of liberty has been sacrificed to the considerations of national economic security," and, "writing desk' economists in every country are having the time of their lives working out their five-year plans." Speeches and comments enthusiastically contributed from the floor, showed that the conference was unanimously behind Mr. Bjerne's contention that it would be entirely practicable for a nation to take the lead and adopt the principle of free trade without waiting for other countries to do likewise.

Another paper read at a Monday session was "Practical Statesmanship for Great Britain," by Frank Dupuis in which he outlined the steps necessary to put Britain on the road to Georg-

ism. Needless to say, Mr. Dupuis' proposals were the subject of animated discussion.

Morning and afternoon meetings on Tuesday were set aside for consideration of the progress which has been made in Denmark towards land value taxation. K. J. Kristensen, Chief of the Central Valuation Department in Denmark, spoke on his country's present position and lines of further progress. "Denmark is the first country in Europe to have put into practical operation the taxation of land values," Mr. Kristensen said. "With each general assessment since 1916 of the capital value of land and improvements for taxation, the land value has been separately assessed," he continued.

"Since 1924 an annual national tax on land values apart from improvements has been levied; and since 1926 the local authorities have been obliged also to levy rates on land values for some part of their annual expenditure. The greater part of the real estate taxation is now levied on land values. Yet the actual application of land value taxation to the Danish taxation system taken as a whole is still a very modest one." Further on in his paper Mr. Kristensen explained that a commission has been nominated in Denmark mainly to meet the wishes of the Justice party, which includes six Georgists, two of whom — Dr. Viggo Starcke and Bue Bjorner—were present at the conference. This party has several times presented a bill in Parliament to the effect of making the total economic rent public property at once, but with compensation to some extent to land-owners.

During the late afternoon session papers were read by J. Rupert Mason on "Land Reclamation and Land Tenure in California" and by A. Daude-Bancel and M. Cortvriend on "The Future of the Georgist Movement in France and Belgium. Although the story of the financing of the irrigation projects on our west coast

is familiar to most American Georgists, it was new material to those gathered at Swanwick, and Mr. Mason soon became the center of a very interested group of questioners.

As to the situation in their countries, the gentlemen from France and Belgium were forced to admit that "the propertied or land-owning class remain consuming rather than producing elements." However, Mr. Daude-Bancel said that he had succeeded in persuading the Socialist Congress of Seine-Inferieure, to adopt a resolution at Dieppe last May, calling for "a tax on the value of land only" to be fixed, as a first step at one per cent, "to replace progressively the customary system of taxation, especially indirect taxation," and he offered as a reason for encouragement that noticeable interest was shown by the two hundred delegates during the one hour speech in which he introduced and explained the resolution. He regarded the frequent applause with which his words were interrupted as a hopeful indication that the conspiracy of silence on this subject had at last been lifted. "Starting Anew in Germany," by Rudolf Schmidt of Berlin, another paper read at that session, described the dreadful conditions in Germany, as "leaving people living at the bare subsistence level." Mr. Schmidt nevertheless held out hope for a revival of the Georgist work through the medium of classes which he will start in Berlin.

Wednesday and Thursday were occupied largely by the reading of papers on the educational aspects of Georgist progress, and the favorable discussion which these papers generated. The Henry George School discussion, which took all of Wednesday morning, is reported elsewhere in this issue. Later in the day

Arthur Madsen outlined the work of Land and Liberty, the valuable monthly magazine published in London of which he is the very capable editor, and of other publications sponsored by Georgist organizations in various parts of the world. The work of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation in publishing the books of Henry George and related literature was covered in a paper which I, as the foundation's secretary, was privileged to read. As I explained, this foundation has been engaged in many activities since its founding in 1925, including the sponsoring of The American Journal of Economics and Sociology, a quarterly publication which is reaching libraries and colleges and is now one of the most widely read journals in its field.

Outstanding papers delivered on Thursday were those by the Hon. Viggo Starcke, "Free versus 'Planned' Economy" and by Margaret E. Bateman on "The Need for Co-ordination and Dissemination of Information on a World Scale." Mr. Starcke won both the heart and hand of the assembly by the manner in which he read his explanation of how production is undermined by those who set themselves up to say "this bread is yours" and "this bread is mine." Very effective was the speaker's use of

small rolls of bread which he pulled unexpectedly from his various pockets and moved about the table in front of him as his talk proceeded. Miss Bateman's excellent paper stressed the need for "streamlining" our efforts to meet the demands of a public which is being submitted to the most modern, the most clever methods of propaganda which a propaganda-conscious age can devise.

Also speaking at one of the mid-week sessions was Dr. Rolland O'Regan of New Zealand, son of the late Justice J. P. O'Regan whose pamphlet, "A Catholic Layman Looks at George," has been widely circulated in the United States. One of the most vocal of the conference members, Dr. O'Regan's oratorical talents had already been proved by the time he was called to present his report on the progress of land value taxation in his country. Recalling that New Zealand is a relatively small, sparsely populated country, he stated that a million pounds is now raised annually by the national government through a graduated land tax of one penny in the pound of unimproved value over five hundred pounds, subject, in the case of large parcels, to certain exclusions. The New Zealand League, Dr. O'Regan said, was organized in the 1890's and has only thirty-odd financial members. Mindful of their limitations, they are now concentrating their efforts on questions of local taxation. "Today, sixty out of a hundred and twenty-four counties, eighty-seven out of a hundred and thirty-four boroughs and seventeen out of twenty-nine towns, have adopted the system of taxing unimproved values. The total local body revenue," Dr. O'Regan went on, "is approximately ten million

pounds per annum, and of this more than half is raised by rates on land values alone. Add what is raised by the National Land Tax," he pointed out, "and you have a total revenue raised in New Zealand by taxes on land values of six million five hundred thousand pounds."

With the week now fast drawing to a close, Friday sessions were devoted to the reading of reports of conference committees and adoption of the resolution and main Declaration of Principle and Policy which appears on page four of this issue.

The election of officers, which resulted in placing J. Rupert Mason in the president's chair, took place on Saturday morning. Other

officers elected at this session were A. W. Madsen, Secretary; Ashley Mitchell, Treasurer; and Frank Dupuis, Assistant Secretary. A long list of vice presidents and committee members allows many countries to be represented in the official group.

One of the last sessions was a public one organized for Saturday afternoon when members of County, Borough and District Councils in Derby and adjoining counties, and members of professions concerned with housing, town planning, valuation, land development and the law and practice of local taxation were invited to join a debate led by Mr. Madsen and Dr. Roland O'Regan, assisted by K. J. Kristensen and J. Rupert Mason on the subject of "Local Authorities and Land Value Rating." Although the visitors did not participate as thoroughly as had been hoped, it is doubtful whether the decision could have been rendered other than hands-down in favor of Messrs. Madsen, et al.

Saturday was also field day for those who, during the week had been put to silence by the gavel before they had fully expressed their opinions, and for points not fully clarified in some of the discussions. A question which came in for animated discussion was whether rent should be levied on the capital or annual value of land. It was generally agreed that, although a partial application of land value taxation could begin by being assessed on the capital value, the ultimate goal of full application would require assessment on the annual rental value.

Although some members of the conference were forced to leave early on Sunday morning, a large representation remained to attend the closing session when the newly elected president, J. Rupert Mason, reviewed the work of the conference. "I feel," Mr. Mason said, "that this conference has been of inestimable value in the contacts it has formed between members of our movement in the many countries that have been represented; in the opportunities it has offered for the exchange of ideas and the useful plans that have been made for the furthering of our important work."

With that, the gavel sounded and the Seventh International Conference to promote Land Value Taxation and Free Trade was ended. Friends bade friends goodbye and, uplifted in mind and spirit started homeward, by land and sea and air.