

Georgeists in the Hungarian Resistance

By CHARLES RAVASZ



Dr. Charles Ravasz was in the Hungarian Diplomatic Service from 1945 to 1948. In 1949 he attended the Henry George School in London. He has been living in Australia since 1950. From 1954 to 1957 he was editor of *The Standard*. He is president of the Australian School of Social Science and a vice-president of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade. He is also vice-president of the Ryde Municipal Assembly of the Australian Labour Party.

IT was August, 1943. I was preparing for my final examination in law and at the same time reading economics at the University of Budapest.

About that time the Smallholders' Party formed a branch in Budapest and, with other liberally minded intellectuals and middle-class people, I went along to join it. I met there a number of other students and young graduates. We soon formed ourselves into a sort of younger set and started to meet regularly to discuss ways and means of how to rebuild Hungary after the war.

One day I left the meeting in the company of a student of ethnography and a student of economics. The two discussed a book which the former had lent to the latter. I listened, trying to find an opportunity to join in the conversation and got the impression that the two had completely adopted the views which they had read in that book. I was frankly dismayed because I was rather prejudiced against people who would read a book and fall for its line. It struck me as a singularly non-academic attitude.

When I asked for the author and title of the book, I was rather relieved to hear that it was *Progress and Poverty* by Henry George, as this book was recommended reading in our economic course at the university, although I had not yet got around to reading it.

My interest was aroused and a few weeks later I got hold of a copy of *Progress and Poverty* and soon became absorbed in it. I read it with mounting excitement. I had been hesitating for a long time trying to find a medium course between liberalism and socialism, to find a compromise between individual freedom and social justice, and now this book revealed that it was not necessary at all to search for a compromise; that the two could go hand in hand and it was possible to achieve each at the same time without in any way impairing or

restricting the other.

My friends took me along to Dr. Pikler, who, then in his late seventies, was the most active and most respected Hungarian Georgeist. A non-practising physician, he was a fascinating man; he spoke and wrote in a most convincing style. He sat in his study and talked about social and economic problems to all-comers. He had been doing it for several decades. Tens of thousands of people passed through his study, including politicians and aspiring politicians of the radical left and the radical right. Of course, more of his knowledge and views rubbed on to some than on others. It would certainly be an exaggeration to say that all those who listened to him became and remained convinced Georgeists, but at least they got an idea of the possibility of a natural state of society which was not made obsolete by advances in science and technology.

There were hundreds who became Dr. Pikler's disciples and advocates of the views which he put forward with such eloquence in his talks and in the articles of his periodical *Allam es polgar* (State and Citizen).

In March, 1944, the Germans occupied Hungary. The young Georgeists bonded themselves together into one of the most active groups of resistance and were represented in the leadership of the Freedom Front of Hungarian Students. It was a time of intense political and para-military activity, with free time filled in with reading and endless debates. I still remember the night when, while painting the town with anti-Nazi slogans, we argued whether land value taxation would extinguish the basis on which it was assessed.

Many of us were arrested by the Gestapo or its Hungarian adjunct. I escaped after a few weeks in jail, but the most gifted of our set, who had the making of a truly great statesman, Bela Papai, the ethnography student whom I mentioned earlier, was never found alive after

having been arrested. He has disappeared without trace.

After the war some of us advocated the formation of a Henry George League, but the majority decided against it. George's advice against political action was taken literally. The educational activities went on for some time and a considerable number of Georgeists were active in politics as members of various parties.

But that is no longer my personal story, and I have written about it on other occasions.

There is just one point which I would like to make in conclusion. The disciples of Henry George are in basic agreement about principles, but there are various schools of thought among them as far as practice and approach are concerned. This is why one Georgeist may honestly belong to a conservative party and another to a socialist one. There were certainly various approaches among Hungarian Georgeists too. But we, the younger generation, or at least "younger" then, were agreed without hesitation in one aspect of our approach: we did not accept Marx's mistaken appreciation of Georgeism as the last ditch of capitalism. To us "capitalism" meant the system in which rent and other unearned income could be capitalised and become the source of spurious value. And to this we were unreservedly opposed. We were not defenders of the

Establishment against reformers who had mistaken ideas. We sided with those who wanted social justice and our efforts were centred on teaching how their ideal could be achieved in combination with individual freedom.

We have not been successful, but I do not think that we were wrong.

I have now lived half my adult life outside my native country: more than ten years in Australia. I have met many Georgeists, and their friendship has enriched my life. But my thoughts go back to those who first introduced me to his philosophy of freedom, for their influence decided the course of my life.

I have sometimes heard people who devoted a lifetime to the principles of George declare in bitterness and frustration that they wish they had never heard of him. I cannot feel that way. For in all those years and in all the countries in which I have lived I have never seen or read anything that would have cast doubt on the soundness of the proposition which he put forward. And there always are, there always must be, people who will seek the truth irrespective of the consequence to themselves. More than one of my friends died for it, "for such is the power of truth." I cannot "speak personally" in a Georgeist magazine without expressing the hope that one day the world they believed in will be their monument.

BOOK REVIEW

Introducing - Yoshisaburo Yamasaki

By V. G. PETERSEN

Henry George's Theory of Land Reform

295 pp. Cloth. Price \$4.00 from Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 50 East 69th Street, New York 21, N.Y.



HENRY GEORGE'S *Theory of Land Reform* is the title of a handsome new volume just brought out by The Izumiya Co., Inc., of Japan. The author, Yoshisaburo Yamasaki, is a professor of social policy at the University of Kobe. According to an English translation of the table of contents, the book covers its subject with professional nicety. Divided into fifteen chapters, one of which gives a biographical sketch of Henry George, it treats such topics as: "Significance of Our Land and Land Policy"; "The Theory of Distribution with Special Reference to the Theory of Poverty". "The United Labour Party, a Short History"; and "Some effects of the Georgeist Movement and its Present Situation", to mention just a few. Elsewhere Henry George is discussed in relation to Herbert Spencer and Leo Tolstoy.

What forces came into the life of Professor Yamasaki to chart his brilliant mind into these special channels of study, we do not know. But we may soon learn, for this gentleman writes that he will sail for the United States in March, to spend the next ten months in New York. The journey, which is being financed and sponsored by Kobe

University and the Rokkodai Foundation, is being made in the hope of completing a Japanese translation of *Progress and Poverty*, a difficult task, but one for which the professor has an excellent background, as his published articles illustrate. These include "George and Tolstoy," which appeared in the Japanese *Journal of Political Economy*, and "The Influence of Henry George's Ideas Upon Modern Japan," printed in English in the Kobe University *Economic Review*. The Schalkenbach Foundation has invited Professor Yamasaki to occupy one of its offices while he is in the metropolitan area.

As we contemplate with pleasure the coming visit of our new friend, and realise what he has accomplished without even the encouragement of a fellow-Georgeist close at hand, the significance of Henry George's words in *Social Problems* is brought home to us and the lesson underscored. "Whoever becomes imbued with a noble idea kindles a flame from which other torches are lit and influences those with whom he comes in contact, be they few or many." In the case of Professor Yamasaki, we can believe that his influence is upon many.