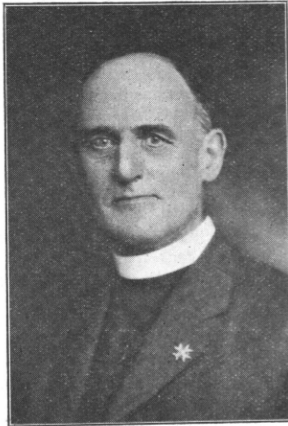


PRIMITIVE GEORGEIST LEGAL BASES

By the Rev. Mervyn J. Stewart, F.R.G.S.

(Resumé of Address at the Copenhagen Conference, 21st July)



REV. MERVYN J. STEWART, F.R.G.S.

However perfect may be our demonstration of the accuracy of Georgeist theory one must always reckon with the man of caution, who distrusts his own power to detect a fallacy and wants to know how the principle works; and that not on a small scale or in local affairs, where admittedly we can prove our case to the uttermost.

The most convincing proof of the value of our philosophy is in Malaya and Nigeria, those parts of the British Empire where the teaching of Henry George has been most nearly applied avowedly to conserve ancient public rights in the land, and to adapt native customary titles to the needs of a fully modern civilization.

"The Crown Lands Ordinance," No. 34 of 1884, Sec. 6, of the Straits Settlements, provided that all future grants of Crown Lands should be reassessed for site value every thirty years, ignoring improvements—this was the first great Georgeist Statute in all the world. It has been adopted in all the adjacent "protected" Malay States, of Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang (the Federated Malay States—1909); Johore (1910), Kelantan (1896), Kedah (1916—largely 15-year periods), Trengganu, Perlis and Brunei (Borneo). In all these States, the payment of the whole site value to the public treasury is accepted as the equivalent of the very ancient native tenures, which involved payments of money rent, of tithe of product, labour on public works, and personal military service in war and peace. Details are very well given in No. 10 Malayan Series, "Land Administration," obtainable at 6d. from 88, Cannon Street, London, E.C.

Due to this fundamental equity there is in Malaya constant general and universal prosperity in face of chaotic markets for rubber, tin and copra; absence of labour troubles and disputes; friendly co-operation between diverse races, Malays, Europeans, Chinese, Indians and many other peoples; large and small holdings flourishing side by side; no unemployment, but a constantly rising wage rate in the face of limitless adjacent masses of underpaid labour who are not excluded in any way. There is no parallel in the world to Malay public finance.

These few millions of brown people own, free of debt,

much more than 2,000 miles of railroads, among the best in the world in equipment and management. They have even lent over four million pounds for "feeder" lines to the less happy Kingdom of Siam; for the railways add their cost to the public revenues as they are extended. Even at the worst collapse of the rubber market there was a Treasury balance of £1 a head, and this with very light taxation and no "protection." This taxation is only due to the fact that all the bad tenures of Europe are found in the "29 varieties" of land titles in Singapore and Malacca, issued in the century before 1884, and these again are aggravated by the English municipal taxation on the use made of land. There is no official objection to the Municipal Single Tax, which has been enacted in Suva Suva, the Capital of Fiji; where it is reported the City Council of Singapore are making inquiries, and where the Legislature is even now working on a general land value tax law to conserve public land rights. These rights are as clear throughout all the Pacific as in Fiji, and there is no shock to Maori thought in commuting all payments and services for a varying economic rent and securing to every producer the whole result of his personal effort.

As population grows and knowledge increases smaller areas per family are the most profitable and beneficial use of land, and the Single Tax provides the economic instrument for simplifying this change in quantity and usage at the proper time. In Northern Nigeria similar Ordinances have been in force since 1910, with amazing results in the tranquillity, prosperity, and commerce of its many millions. Conservative Cabinet Ministers are proud to proclaim this Georgeist area as "the brightest jewel in the British Crown," though disfigured by "protection," bad railway finance, and English land titles in the important harbours of Southern Nigeria.

The Northern Nigerian culture is level, fairly high, and rising steadily from chattel slavery and wage serfdom. Such a great city as Kano, with a population of about 100,000 and great trade and manufactures has no slum area to compare in misery with any large town in Europe, or places such as Bombay or Singapore, or the old Nigerian colony of Lagos, with its English tenures. *Native Races and Their Rulers*, by Temple, is about the best book published on this little known area. (Capetown *Argus*, 1918, 2s. 6d.)

The latest outgrowth of the Nigerian Georgeist land laws is Land Ordinance No. 3 of 1923 of Tanganyika Territory (mandated to Great Britain by the League of Nations), which, avowedly to preserve the existing ancient rights of the native public to the land, and to assure them sustenance, for themselves and their posterity provides for the site value of all available lands to be paid to the public Treasury, and reassessed at intervals disregarding improvements. The land belongs to the Ruler, as trustee for the public; the improvement and the product belong to the producer, but the rent cannot be alienated.

This is not only Maori, or Malay, or Bantu, or Nigerian law, but English law also. The Crown *owns* every bit of land and no "owner" can own any part but his improvements, and *hold* the land as tenant. Only in the British Empire and in Soviet Russia is there no private ownership of land, in law; and so it is, that the Crown lawyers have never advised rejection or delay of a Georgeist enactment from any of the Colonies.

The tragedy is that the false education of the British administrative class sends them into the world with firm belief in the value and virtues of Land Monopoly and densely ignorant of how their kindly intentions may be carried out. But no more, surely, remains to

be said. Too much is repeated to-day as to the weakness and deficiencies of savage races. When one adds to the acute misery of perhaps a fifth of any community where public rights to the land are ignored, the constant racking anxiety for the future of perhaps another three-fifths, and the fear of violence and instability which haunts the "Thoroughly Comfortable," we may doubt if the savage or barbarian, take him at his worst, is not better off on the average than we.

When we reflect on the illimitable production of good things which our metal slaves can provide for us, on our facilities for international mutual help by exchange, on the inventive faculties of our young folk now as a rule crushed by poverty and perverted by a lack of decent opportunity for self-expression, we can indeed be grateful for the clear vision which Henry George transmits to every fair and intelligent reader of the natural conditions, where "Progress" and "Poverty" are once and for all separated by the very book which describes them, or perhaps from henceforth to be coupled as Progress and Justice, or Progress and Liberty. Let us take heart. The whole earth gives a verdict which cannot lightly be brushed aside; and the code of every primitive people (and the primitive code of every sophisticated people) is Georgeist in basis, while every attempt to legalise injustice must fail, or destroy those who will submit to it.

"Truth struck to earth shall rise again,
The eternal years of God are hers;
But Error wounded writhes in pain,
And dies amid her worshippers."

THE DANISH LEAGUE OF JUSTICE (From the General to the Particular)

At the opening session of the Copenhagen Conference Mrs. SIGNE JØRNER spoke of the work being done by the Danish association known as the "League of Justice," whose objects she said were to establish the "State of Justice" in place of the "State of Power" or the "State of Force" that now prevailed. The League of Justice stood for complete freedom from taxation and the collection of the whole economic rent of land, with equal and free participation in the government of public affairs—under the (proxy) system of the "free franchise," which came into the picture on the last session of the Conference and could not be explained here except at much length. In the field of economic life, the League of Justice, Mrs. Bjørner said, would vindicate fully the freedom of the individual and draw a clear and certain boundary around the functions of the State, so that the State would no longer interfere, as it harmfully does to-day, in those activities best performed by the individual. In order to get at the people when they were most awake, namely at election times, the League of Justice had formed a separate political party and were putting up candidates whenever there was an appeal to the voters.

The programme of the Danish "League of Justice" was thus sketched in general terms, but it would have been a help to the Conference if the practical policy for achieving these economic aims had been defined. There are differences of opinion within the League. They are all willing to proceed by the progressive (step by step) repeal of taxes on industry and the gradual adoption of the policy of land value taxation. The question at issue among them is the "all at once" plan on which the Justice League was founded in 1921. It is in their literature and was proclaimed at the last General Election, but the plan is a negation

of the whole principle of land value taxation, because it involves compensation to landowners—at an amount estimated to be equivalent to half the present selling value of the land. It is a scheme which means in effect that the whole economic rent of land would be left untouched in private hands for a period of at least ten years from the appointed day; and the compensation was and is (on the plan) to be obtained partly from a capital levy on all wealth, and partly from the disposal of all State and municipal undertakings—railways, tramways, schools, gas works, etc., etc. This plan is now shelved by the responsible spokesmen only in so far as they maintain that if the "all at once" scheme was adopted, compensation to the landowners from the sources already named, would have to be given. Members of the International Conference are free to form their own opinion of such confusions and contradictions. What it all has to do with the plain and straightforward policy of the Taxation of Land Values and Free Trade, is difficult to see.

A. W. M.

THE STATE AND THE INDIVIDUAL Review of Mr. Maynard Keynes' Book "The End of Laissez Faire."*

By W. R. LESTER, M.A.

Mr. Keynes is a lucid writer and interesting to boot. Nor can his ability be called in question. As a rule he leaves his readers in no doubt either as to his premises or his conclusions, but we rise from a perusal of this small book with a sense of mystification and a feeling that the author has made no serious effort to come to close quarters with the subject he discusses. The impression left is that, while his aim is to discredit those who base their social philosophy on the beneficence and harmony of the natural order, he is at pains to avoid any direct frontal attack on them and, instead, adopts a peculiar method of ironical insinuation which to us is far from convincing. The problem to which he addresses himself is as to what the organized state should take upon itself and what it should leave to individual exertion. The drawing of this line he describes as "perhaps the chief task of economists at this hour" and still, by his own confession, he fails to draw it, finding himself unable to do more than cite a few quite unrelated examples of things which he thinks should not be left to individual enterprise and which should therefore be undertaken by the State. From beginning to end there is no sign that Mr. Keynes has discovered any guiding principle and nowhere does he rise above the mere exponent of expediency. To quote his own words:—

"We cannot settle on abstract grounds, but must handle on its merits in detail what Burke termed 'one of the finest problems in legislation, namely, to determine what the State should take upon itself to direct by public wisdom, and what it ought to leave, with as little interference as possible, to individual exertion'."

Could opportunism go further than this?

Having adopted such a premise, he disqualifies himself for drawing any clear line of demarcation, though later on, seeming to realize how unsatisfactory this is, he ventures on the tentative suggestion that progress may lie in growth of the recognition of semi-autonomous bodies within the State whose criterion of

* The Hogarth Press, London, W.C.1, 2s.