

RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT — By Dr D. G. Taylor, M.A.

SPEAKING AT the Annual Meeting of the Welsh League for the Taxation of Land Values, Cardiff, 13th March, Dr Taylor took as his text "World Conflict and Home Policy." He said it would be difficult to find in the whole range of history years so violently contrasted as 1880, just after *Progress and Poverty* was published, and 1942. In mid-Victorian times confidence and buoyancy were at their highest pitch. We had no political problems except Ireland and the extension of the franchise; it was thought we were on the road to the millenium, that it was due in a few years' time. What influence had the Henry George teaching shed? It had been throughout those years after 1880 a great instrument of social and economic education, principally in this country, in the Dominions and the U.S.A., and in a lesser degree through the European world. To thousands *Progress and Poverty* had been a liberal education, and it was in fact that book which had been the textbook of reformers in this country, not *Das Kapital*. It had a message for the Russian and the Indian peasant as well as for the British artisan; it was high-principled, Christian, taught no doctrine of class-hatred, and relied on intelligence and rational propoganda and peaceful political progress.

But the world had not moved as Henry George or anyone of his time had anticipated. The teaching that "association in equality is the law of progress" had to meet not only the challenge of the old-established systems of inequality, but the new challenge of militant totalitarianism; and the question occurred to him whether, if Henry George were alive to-day, we would have a re-statement, especially in his great chapter on the Law of Human Progress.

Our overseas empire was the creation of our ruling aristocracy. We might question the desirability of creating an empire; but, speaking after the deluge, he would say that if you will have an empire you are bound to provide an adequate defence for it. If we failed in that, our failure would be due to our insularity. Plato was a philosopher and a man of peace, but he had an ever-present sense of the danger of aggression across the frontiers. The U.S.A. and Great Britain are among the few great countries in world history that have been able to ignore this point of view.

It may be that we are at the beginning of an age of turbulence unfavourable to anything but a succession of hand-to-mouth expedients. In such a case, where are we as a movement? It is only in a broad and stable peace that the work that is near to our hearts can prosper. We go on in the faith that truth is great and will prevail, and it is not limited to one country or continent. The greatest single step towards land monopoly had been the spoliation of the monasteries by Henry VIII, but, as Hilaire Belloc ruefully admits, this was the basis of English progress in the sense that the aristocracy produced the longest-lasting national institutions; it was to this that we owed stable government, and that after two centuries of this aristocracy the principles of land value taxation could come to the

light of day. Nor would he grudge the aristocrats the credit for permitting such a moderate degree of freedom of thought and speech to grow up as made it possible for the doctrine of equal rights to land to come to birth. Most urgent and necessary was *Education*; for in time of war minds were shaken up and were more open to fresh points of view than in normal times. During a war the claims of the common man are generously admitted, though he usually gets a "raw deal" in the settlement which follows.

CHAPMAN WRIGHT

WITH DEEP regret we have to report the death of W. Chapman Wright. It was a sudden passing for he had been active to the last moment and he was in his office on 13th March when it happened. Chapman Wright, in his 79th year, was one of the veterans of the movement who gave his whole life to it with the utmost devotion and much self-sacrifice. As a young man he had already caught the fervour and wishing to be helpful acted as a canvasser for the English League. His travels brought him to Birmingham where he became the local representative of the Financial Reform Association. It was at the time of the great campaign for the 1909 "People's Budget" that the Midland Land Values League was formed and the choice of the man to conduct it naturally fell upon him. His perseverance, his knowledge, his intellectual attainments and, above all, his patient and modest character, endeared him to all who had the privilege of his intimate acquaintance. To the general literature of the campaigns he helped to organise, he made many contributions in the way of leaflets, folders, and pamphlets. Most notable was his *Hundred Reasons for Taxing Land Values*, and another, his leaflet, *A Tale of Two Cities*, comparing Birmingham (or any British city) with Sydney, which was a great favourite at many municipal elections. Himself he was candidate for the Birmingham Council on four occasions, but although he had good votes he did not succeed save in blazing the path for others to enter the Council who have raised the question over and over again. Out of these municipal campaigns grew the Sydney Rating Association which did a special and very valuable work at the time, so forcing attention upon the Council that the City Treasurer was commissioned to produce a report upon the Rating of Land Values which required to be and was answered by a widely circulated pamphlet published by the United Committee. By open air and indoor meetings, by his membership of the local Parliamentary Debating societies, by organising economic study classes and petitions signed by rate-payers, by the house-to-house distribution of literature, and similar activities, Chapman Wright was never idle but always inspiring and exhorting others to make opinion for the cause he had so deeply at heart. He left on his table a whole list of meetings he was about to address. His death is a serious loss also to the United Committee of which he was a member; he will be missed not only for his kindly companionship but also for the sound

judgment he always brought to the consideration of practical affairs, the more so as he had such a thorough grasp of all that pertained to the philosophy of equal freedom. On behalf of his colleagues not only in the Midlands area but throughout the country, we extend to Mrs Wright and her daughters our sincere sympathy in their bereavement.—A.W.M.

LET'S GET WHAT BELONGS TO US

IF SOMEONE had something of value belonging to you, and the fact that it was really yours could be easily proven, what would you do about it?

From a personal point of view the answer is obvious. From Society's viewpoint, the answer would be the same as a matter of principle; but to the average person, such a truism may sound rather far-fetched; because most of us do not realize that Great Britain has an income of nearly £45,000,000 every month, that it is *not getting*.

The rent of land (or what is commonly known as the "location value" of land) is the result of population and its activities. "Activities" include the services rendered by government (roads, schools, sewage, police and fire protection, etc.); plus the services offered by individuals, in their chosen way of getting a living (manufacturers' stores, garages, theatres, doctors, etc.), the more people, the more of all such services there will be—and the *more rent*.

Consequently, as the people create the rent of land, it plainly belongs to the people, to us, just as what the individual produces (or the money he gets for doing so)—belongs to him.

One of the simplest ways to get "our rent" would be to have government (as trustee for all of us) do the collecting, just as it now collects current taxes.

Whenever we do decide "to get what belongs to us," taxes on labour products (buildings, machinery, food, clothing, luxuries, etc.), could be done away with—as they should be; because—

Taxes on the products of labour (always switched to the consumer) increase prices; increased prices result in lessened consumption; lessened consumption means poor business; poor business causes unemployment; unemployment necessitates more taxes, "broadening the tax base" to finance relief—a vicious circle, if there ever was one.

This "collection of our rent"; this "getting what belongs to all"; this "payment to government for services rendered by government"—call it what you like—should receive more than superficial consideration; because it is imperative (if we are to escape bankruptcy) that we become better acquainted with the effect which taxes on labour products have on business and capital and particularly on all of us—as consumers.

Nearly everybody has some definite theory as to what is wrong with our economic set-up—and a remedy; but, let's get what belongs to us first; after which, each can return to whatever earlier concept for bettering society he may have had.

Adapted from a statement by Hollis J. Joy.