

The Movement in Denmark And The Copenhagen Conference

(Address of Charles O'Connor Hennessey at the Henry George Congress, Sept. 2.).

I REGRET that circumstances have denied me the opportunity since my return from Europe, to prepare the address assigned to me, in such form as to be worthy of this occasion, and of the subject—"The Copenhagen International Conference for the Taxation of Land Values and Free Trade." It may be just as effective, however, if you will let me just talk to you in an intimate way about our experience in Denmark, which was the most remarkable and most inspiring event, to me at least, that has occurred during the more than forty years in which I have been a follower of Henry George and his philosophy.

In many respects, the Conference, by its numbers, its representative character, its enthusiasms, and its incidents was an agreeable and unexpected revelation. At the outset we found that the printed roll of the paid membership revealed the names of subscribers from twenty-six countries. Seventeen different countries were actually represented on the floor of the splendid Conference hall on the opening day. Another striking fact was the extraordinary interest manifested by the press of Denmark and representatives of the government. Leaders in the public life of the country, as well as the leaders of the daily newspapers seemed to regard our gathering as one of great national if not international importance. An obvious indication of this fact was the assignment of the handsome joint assembly chamber at the House of Parliament, with its convenient adjoining committee rooms, for the uses of the Conference, which in the press, by the way, was referred to as an international "Congress" of the Georgists of the world. Copenhagen is a city of more than 700,000 people. Its enterprising daily newspapers compare favorably with daily journals of any city of similar size in the world. They carried columns upon columns of daily reports, interviews and comments about the doings of the Conference, including pictures and cartoons of prominent personalities in attendance. I am told that the weekly papers of Denmark, outside of the capital city, attached similar public importance to our gathering.

One of the notable events of the week was the turning over of the Government radio station for the broadcasting of an address on free trade and land value taxation by the president of the Conference, a translation of which was immediately put upon the air in the Danish tongue, and was, I am informed, listened to not only in many thousands of homes in Denmark, but probably beyond the national borders, in Sweden. A feature of the address was a reference to the Danish translation of "Progress and Poverty" and advice as to how the book could be procured. Another incident of unusual character was the public dedication of a

Henry George section in the public library in the Parliament Houses, at which Mr. Berthelsen, a noted Danish delegate to the Conference, presented his large library of Georgist books, including many translations of "Progress and Poverty" and other works to the government, the gift being formally acknowledged and accepted in a happy address by the president of the upper house of Parliament.

You may measure how far things have gone and are going for our cause in Denmark if I ask you to imagine the Congress of the United States offering the Chamber of the House of Representatives for a Henry George international congress to last a week; if you can picture Vice President Dawes expressing his gratification at being able to add to the Congressional Library a special section in which the message of Henry George could be studied in all languages; and if you can further vision the possibility of Secretary Mellon and Secretary Hoover joining in an enthusiastic commendation of the purpose of an international gathering called to promote free trade and the taxation of land values as preached by Henry George. In Denmark, Mr. Hauge, the Government Minister for Home Affairs, on the opening day of the Conference, sent a letter which was afterwards widely published and commented on, in which he said, among other things, that the community should assert the unrestricted right to appropriate the economic rent of land. At the great banquet which closed the Conference, the Finance Minister, Mr. Branasnaes, was one of the honored guests and made an outspoken declaration that showed his understanding of the George philosophy and his desire to see it attained in law by progressive steps of the Government of Denmark. Similar significant addresses were made during the week by Ole Hanson, President of the Upper House, Ove Rode, ex-Minister of Home Affairs, and by Niels Fredericksen, a member of Parliament, who occupies the powerful position of being president of the great organization of housemen (small farmers) who were in session in Copenhagen during our Conference. It was pointed out more than once by official as well as unofficial spokesmen for the Danes, that the legislation already in effect for collecting a part of the national revenue as well as a portion of local revenues by taxation of land values exclusive of improvements, with incidental exemptions upon improvements, is regarded as only a beginning. "We know the road we are traveling, and the end at which we aim" said one of these statesmen to me, "and we are on the way, and will not stop until we secure economic emancipation for the people of Denmark."

Another thing that struck me most forcibly was that political support for land value taxation and free trade is to be found among the public men of all political parties. This is probably due to the fact that a very large body of the electorate, constituted of the small farmers of the country, are organized and pledged to the reforms that we believe in, and are led by highly intelligent and forceful personalities, like Mr. Fredericksen. I will never forget the

thrill that came to all of us who were permitted to participate as guests at the closing gathering of the National Congress of the Housemen, presided over by Mr. Fredericksen. It was stated that there were 2000 delegates to the congress. A hall that would seat not more than 600 people was packed to suffocation and many were excluded, I believe, because they could not obtain even standing room. Sturdy, clear-eyed, intelligent, small farmers, probably the pick of their kind in Denmark, constituted this crowd, who cheered to the echo when Henry George's daughter, Mrs. deMille, was introduced to say a few words. And then, led by their President, they sang without instrumental accompaniment, but in perfect musical unison, their inspiring "Danske Land-Sang" (Land Song beginning: "Fatherland, the People's Own.") It deeply affected Mrs. deMille, as it did the rest of us from America, for it was one of the greatest tributes ever paid to the memory of her great father.

Then there was the unforgettable ceremony around the Liberty Monument in the center of the broad public street in the heart of the city, that afternoon. This monument, known as the Column of Liberty, was erected in 1797 to commemorate a royal edict at that time granting a large degree of economic emancipation to the agricultural workers of Denmark by putting an end to a cruel system of villenage imposed upon the masses by the landlord nobility of the period. The housemen, upon the adjournment of their congress, marched through the streets of the city accompanied by the delegates from the Henry George Conference, and led by seventeen attractive women, each of them carrying a national flag of the countries represented at the Conference. The Stars and Stripes was carried by pretty Mary Leubuscher, of New York, leading the procession. At the monument, a great assemblage had gathered, and the police had roped off the street at that point against ordinary traffic. The managers of our Conference had provided a beautiful floral garland which bore the inscription, on silk streamers, for all Copenhagen to see: "From the friends of Henry George in All Parts of the World." This was handed by the President of the Conference to Mrs. deMille who, with the grand-daughters of Henry George, standing on either side of her, laid it at the base of the granite column amid great cheering. Then there were speeches in English, Danish, Swedish, German and French, the voices of the speakers being carried by amplifiers to the outskirts of the crowd. Perhaps the most effective of these speeches was that of Ove Rode, now an active member of Parliament, who spoke eloquently in both English and Danish, extolling the motto—"Free land, Free trade, Free men." It was an occasion, the memory of which will always remain with me—an occasion to stir the blood of any lover of liberty who was privileged to have a part in it.

During the monument ceremonies, the master of ceremonies was that splendid Danish character—Folke—the man who, with his associate, Abel Brink, and with John Paul and Arthur Madsen, were the organizers of the Confer-

ence. It was thrilling to see this handsome, blond, clean-shaven giant, his face lit up with enthusiasm, leading the great crowd of housemen in the streets, singing again their beautiful land song, while some of the Germans tried to keep up with them in German, and some of the English or American delegates sang the English words.

One thing that was made very plain to us was the devotion of the small farmers of Denmark to the cause of Henry George. Indeed, I was assured that it is a common thing to find Henry George's portrait in the living room of many a small farm house, and the Danish translation of "Progress and Poverty" on their book-shelves. Of what other country in the world can we say anything like this?

I noted a comment made at your meeting today by our old friend, Miss Rogers, that women were not prominent in your proceedings here in Philadelphia, which reminds me to say that many fine women beside Mrs. deMille took part in the Conference at Copenhagen, including Mrs. Signe Bjorner, a brilliant Danish woman who speaks eloquently in English, and Madame Hansson of Sweden, both of whom participated actively in the discussions as did Miss Colbron, Miss Charlotte Schetter, and Mrs. Skeel of New York, the latter a new but notable figure in our movement.

Next to the Danes, and the splendid British delegation I was impressed with the character and ability of the fine German representation at the Conference. There were 22 of them, including four or five who were men of some prominence in the public life of Germany. Four, I believe, are members of provincial parliaments. One was a vice-admiral of the German navy. Some of the younger men among the Germans impressed me greatly by their ability and devotion to the cause, notably Dr. Paletta and Dr. Otto Karutz, both men under thirty, and each of them speaking good English. Dr. Karutz spoke Danish and Swedish, and I think, French as well. My contacts with him in Germany, later on, encouraged me to believe in the great possibility for economic education along our lines in that country.

But I could not, without making this talk too long, tell you all of the encouraging aspects of this international movement. I must say, however, that I came away from Denmark deeply impressed with its possibilities, and that it presents a great opportunity and a great need for those who believe in advancing the acceptance of our philosophy throughout the world. I need not, to this audience, stress the point that Henry George was essentially an internationalist; that his gospel was preached for the benefit of people everywhere, without distinction of race or of national boundary.

The two outstanding acts of the Conference at Copenhagen that emphasized its world-wide character were first, the adoption of an address to the statesmen of the League of Nations, telling them in substance that in their aim to end war, they must reconstruct the economic relations of the people on such economic bases of freedom and justice as

will do away with the hates, and fears and greeds that are the true causes of international antipathies and misunderstanding.

The final act of the Conference was the formation of a permanent International Union to Promote the Taxation of Land Values and Free Trade, to which men in every land are to be invited to give their support. I was greatly honored by being asked to accept the Provisional Presidency of this Union in connection with a Secretariat composed of John Paul and Arthur W. Madsen, of Great Britain, and F. Folke and Abel Brink of Denmark, the men who were most responsible for the success of the Copenhagen Conference. The Provisional Committee, which will stand for the organization of this international work, is now being completed. It includes, among Americans, such names as that of Louis F. Post, Anna George deMille, Fred. C. Leubuscher, Chester C. Platt, and Dr. Milliken. This International Union has a great and noble work to do and it will succeed only in the degree that it receives the support, moral and financial, of those everywhere in the world who believe in spreading the gospel of Henry George. I shall hope that it will receive its strongest support in the land that gave birth to our great teacher.

Henry George Fifty Years Ago and To-Day

Address of Will Atkinson at the Banquet of the Henry George Foundation, Sept. 3, 1926.

A FEW blocks from here thirty-seven years ago a dinner to Henry George was given in the Bullitt Building. There were 426 present. I had the honor to be Toastmaster. Two clergymen made addresses; one from Cincinnati and one from Henry, Ill. Ministers who openly advocated the doctrines of Henry George were rare in those days and both were given prominent places on the programme. Both apparently mistook the occasion and while their addresses were eloquent, they sounded like funeral sermons and had a depressing effect on the digestions of the diners.

The second speaker was a wealthy merchant, A. H. Stephenson, one of the ablest, most devoted, and most self-sacrificing of the early followers of Henry George in Philadelphia, who in order to do more effective work, took a course at the National School of Elocution and Oratory which he completed just before this dinner. His speech was the first he made after his graduation. It was a very serious affair for him and he made it a very serious one for us.

It seemed to be my duty to lighten the spirits of those present by telling stories at which the diners laughed. Henry George laughed with the others, but after each story he leaned over to me and said, "The application, the application." In each case I lugged in an application by the ears but I never again attempted to tell a story in Henry George's presence without having an application handy.

He had a keen sense of humor but he did not want even a story wasted. He had a horror of waste and it was the waste involved in our foolish attempts to defy the laws of nature and of nature's God, the needless and useless suffering and waste of human lives, which inspired him to write his immortal works.

What manner of man was this who rose over night from poverty and obscurity to world-wide fame?

Fifty years ago there lived in San Francisco a man of 37 whose life was thought by many to be a hopeless failure. He had sought gold in California and in Canada but failed. He had been a sailor without rising from the forecastle. He had earned a precarious living setting type. Had failed as part owner of a job-printing plant. Had established a paper only to lose it after four years of hard work because his conscience was scrupulous and his enemies lacked scruple.

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At 37 to support his family, he was reduced to soliciting a political job and was made State Inspector of Gas Meters. The brilliant company there of newspaper men and authors (many of national fame) called him, some carelessly, some contemptuously, "little Henry George."

He set himself the task of writing a book on political economy,—the Dismal Science, though even with great names attached such books seldom sold a thousand copies.

He deliberately challenged and sought to overthrow the greatest of monopolies, the monopoly of the earth.

Can you imagine deed more daring? A soul more knightly? Here one man, poor and alone, flung down his gage to the great ones of the earth;—set his puny strength to overthrow a wrong hoary with antiquity, buttressed by the custom of ages. What hero of history or romance, of fact or fiction, ever matched it?

Nor was it the valor of ignorance, for he had just felt the heavy hand of privilege. "Greater love hath no man than this, that he laid down his life for his friend." Yet this man laid his life on the altar for strangers, for the poor and weak, the friendless, the oppressed of all the earth.

His only university had been the University of Hard Knocks, his books were men, his college the printer's case. His book completed, his friends helped him set the type as he could find a publisher in no other way. Ten years later, the unknown San Francisco printer was elected Mayor of the greatest of American cities (though as afterward admitted by Tammany men, he was counted out) and "Progress and Poverty" had already sold more than a million copies.

Why? Because this printer dipped his pen in life, his words throbbed with sympathy for suffering and thrilled with the logic of truth. He taught that men's miseries are due to man-made laws, never to divine law. That the ignorance which shelters in schools, the crime which lurks in the shadow of churches; famine amid full granaries, poverty in plenty, are all due to men's laws which ignore