

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS AT THE CONFERENCE

By the Hon. Charles O'Connor Hennessy

(The full Address, of which this is a condensation, may be obtained at the offices of the International Union, 11, Tothill Street, London, S.W.1.)



HON. CHARLES O'CONNOR HENNESSY

We are here from many countries to bear witness that a half-century after the first appearance of Henry George's fearful diagnosis of a vast social disease, the symptoms still persist. . . . The cure remains to be applied. Industrial depression and unemployment are common to many countries, and even in the nominally "prosperous" United States great numbers live in poverty, or close to its border line, and remedies for unemployment are now being sought in still more restrictive immigration

laws, and in prohibitive tariff taxes.

Henry George predicted that the enormous increase in the power to produce wealth which had marked his century, due to invention and discovery and the improvement of communications, would continue to go on with accelerating ratio. This has come true to an enormous extent in all so-called civilized countries—most especially in the United States of America. But without the establishment of economic freedom in the processes of producing wealth and justice in its distribution, he predicted that increased wealth must benefit the few rather than the many. It would have, broadly speaking, no tendency to extirpate poverty and the social evils which poverty engenders, no influence in elevating society as a whole or in lightening the burdens of those compelled to toil for a living. Again his prophecy has been realized. For increasing wealth, and the condition that is referred to as national prosperity, far from assuring contentment and abundance for all, has tended only to widen the gulf between the very rich and the very poor, and to make more intense the struggle for existence that engages the lives of millions of human beings, even in richest America.

VIOLATION OF NATURAL LAW

In the light of the history of the fifty years that have gone since *Progress and Poverty* first appeared, no comprehending reader of it may now doubt the extraordinary accuracy of the thought and vision of its author; that he was seer as well as prophet—an unerring diagnostician of the social and economic ailments of the world and of their cure, an inspired preacher of the way of righteousness and salvation for the nations. Henry George's intellectual eminence is now coming to be recognized by discerning leaders of thought, even in his own land. New editions of his books are appearing, and in many American colleges and universities where, in the past, his teachings have been avoided, young men and women now are learning the lessons that he taught. The great truth that he sought to make plain is slowly but surely, we believe, making its way to the minds of men.

The social and economic dislocations which afflict the world arise because of that fundamental violation of natural law involved in the denial to human beings of their equal and inalienable rights to the use of the Earth. Out of this perversion of natural law and this

denial of fundamental human rights sanctioned by the governments of the world, arises in every country the great issues comprehended in the Land Question and its portentous implications.

PEACE AND WAR

Because this is an international gathering, and because good men and women in every part of the world are now actively concerning themselves about questions of Peace and War, of Disarmament, of Conciliation and Arbitration, we would point out how vital to any permanent settlement of such questions is the solution of the economic problems to which we would first direct attention. More than ten years ago there came to an end that world tragedy which for evil destructiveness was without parallel in the history of humanity, . . . and, as never before, thoughtful men and women have been brought to realize that savagery and barbaric ruthlessness are of the very nature of modern war; that it grows by what it feeds upon, and that not the least of its evils is the destructive psychology which it creates—the vast and insidious lies and hates that destroy the spirit of amity between friendly peoples.

Peace is not in sight, and War, and all that it means in burdens to be borne in the present and in moral and material horrors and losses to be faced in the future, still remains with the world. True, there has been at Locarno a solemn gesture of worthy intention and goodwill between the nations. But Locarno must always seem somewhat unrelated to reality so long as governments take no steps to remove the root causes of poverty in every country. From the perversion or interference with natural laws flow the social and political phenomena involved in industrial depression, unemployment, the warfare of classes at home, the struggle for international markets and privileges abroad, international fears and jealousies, and those selfish national policies which aim to advance the welfare of one people by rendering injury to another.

PREPARATIONS FOR WAR

True, we have had the Kellogg-Briand Pact to outlaw War, which has been hailed, in my country at least, as a triumph of peace-making diplomacy. How seriously, may we ask, can sensible men and women regard this Pact of Paris if they would frankly view it in the light, not only of its qualifications and reservations, but of the undeniable fact that War and the preparations for War remain the greatest industry of most of the large and so-called civilized nations which subscribed to this Treaty. The dominant political party which in the United States sponsored this Peace gesture, is the same which now builds new battleships, and, in the interest of powerful privileged classes, is proposing new tariff barriers against the friendly commerce of the world; proposals that have already evoked formal protests by the representatives of many nations, and threats of reprisal from Europe and South America.

Let us who are followers of Henry George, citizen of the world, who hated war not only for what it is in itself but because he loved justice and his fellow men, here again declare that war can never be banished by mere denunciation or renunciation by treaties that make gestures, however sincere, of friendship and goodwill, nor by any formula of disarmament that politicians, however honest, may be able to devise. These, we believe, are the ways of blindness and futility, as any critical or reflective thinking must, we think, reveal.

Since last we met, there has been held the World Economic Conference at Geneva summoned by the League of Nations, to which fifty nations sent representatives. It deliberated for some weeks in 1927, and adjourned, after agreement upon a striking statement respecting the interdependence of the economic causes of war and industrial depression. An increase in the number and the altitude of tariff barriers set up in Europe since the Peace of Versailles was agreed upon as one of the chief sources of Europe's economic troubles. The President, Monsieur Theunis of Belgium, summarized the European situation in a few words:—

"The main trouble now," said M. Theunis, "is neither any material shortage of the resources of nature, nor any inadequacy in man's power to exploit them. It is all, in one form or another, a maladjustment; not an insufficient productive capacity, but a series of impediments to the full utilization of that capacity. The main obstacles to economic revival have been the hindrances opposed to the free flow of labour, capital and goods."

Well, what, may we ask, has been accomplished by the governments of the world toward the removal of those "main obstacles to economic revival" pointed out two years ago in the unanimous report of the representatives of the fifty nations who composed the World Economic Conference? The answer is—practically nothing. The spirit of selfishness, greed and fear seems still to dominate international politics. The menace of industrial depression, of unemployment, and of new wars remains with the world. . . .

SECURITY THAT WILL ENDURE

We would call upon statesmanship to look behind war, and the armaments and instruments of war, for the economic dislocations which pervert the normal course of the lives of human beings and of nations alike. . . . Men may cry "Peace! Peace!" but there can be no lasting peace until the root causes of War are recognized and removed; until the peoples may be led to accept a new and simple philosophy of human relationships—that of equal rights for all, freedom for all, justice for all. Political peace and economic war are irreconcilable. There can be no political peace at home or abroad unless it is founded upon co-operation in freedom and in mutual friendship and respect. There can be no security that will endure, until justice is established at home and abroad. We would not disparage the efforts nor impeach the sincerity of those who labour for Disarmament or for Conciliation. We feel that they are engaged in the most difficult if not impossible of labours, which, even if successful, would but serve as palliatives, rather than a cure. . . . The most helpful approach to a true and peaceful concert of nations in the interest of permanent World Peace must lie, as Professor Dewey recently pointed out, not in the field of political diplomacy, but along the road of economic freedom and justice that leads to a realization of the common interests of the peoples of the world.

POLITICAL EDUCATION BEFORE POLITICS

All this we believe can be translated into living truth and reality whenever men of faith and good-will are ready for it. For Henry George was more than a moral idealist and scientific expositor of the eternal verities of political economy as applied to human relationships. . . . He was, beyond all this, a far-seeing statesman and skilful politician, who clearly delineated the progressive steps which might be taken in any country to advance the ultimate translation into the law of the land of the principles of economic justice. But he counselled political education before politics; the awakening of the public mind to a realization of the

justice and necessity of a great change. Right thinking, he believed, could best be advanced through public discussion, whenever policies or proposals involving these principles had reached the arena of practical politics, as they have in Great Britain and in Denmark at this time. He proposed a simple political formula aimed at the evils of land monopoly, whereby the restrictions upon and obstructions to the production and distribution of wealth might gradually be removed, and the blessings of economic freedom ultimately be established throughout the world. . . . This formula we briefly express in the statement of the objects which this Union of ours is organized to promote and advance. These objects are Land Value Taxation and Free Trade. We aim to open the door of opportunity to capital and labour alike by abolishing every tax or impost, internal or external, that interferes with the freedom of men to employ their highest capacities in the production or exchange of wealth.

TAXING MONOPOLY TO DEATH

A philosopher has given currency to the pregnant aphorism that "the power to tax is the power to destroy." And we, being convinced that common and equal rights to the use of land are indispensable to freedom and effectiveness in the production of wealth and to justice in its distribution, aim to destroy land monopoly through the processes of taxation. That is, we would resort for public revenues to taxes upon the values given to particular land sites by the competition for their use made necessary by the activities and the growth of community life. . . . Land values, arising out of the association and co-operation of people, are essentially a community product. By every test then, of logic or of equity, the policy we advocate justifies itself. To quote Henry George, "We would simply take for the community what belongs to the community, and leave sacredly to the individual all that belongs to the individual."

And in the international field we aim to teach the world that the highest interests of the people of every land are identical with the interests of the people of every other land; that human interests are interwoven and interdependent, and that only under conditions of freedom, of mutual trust, and of friendly co-operation may men or nations attain to the highest destiny, material or spiritual, that God makes possible for them. In brief, it is our purpose as an organization, in the interest of peace, prosperity and human happiness, to extend the area of freedom in every land, not only because we are convinced that this is the way to uplift the material welfare of mankind, but also because it accords with justice and the moral law. Here in the language of our inspired teacher is the conclusion of the whole matter:—

"That we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us; that we should respect the rights of others as scrupulously as we would have our own rights respected, is not a mere counsel of perfection to individuals, but it is the *law* to which we must conform social institutions and national policies if we would secure the blessings of abundance and peace."

And, taking note of our place of meeting to-day, I think I may well conclude by expressing what is in the hearts of all of us, wherever our homelands may be, in the lines of a famous poem, recently publicly quoted by no less a person than Herbert Hoover, President of the United States:—

"Then let us pray that come it may,
As come it will for a' that,

That man to man, the world o'er,
Shall brothers be for a' that."