

Proceedings of The London Conference

LONDON, September 10. Last Saturday there was an adjournment here, after five days of active sessions, of the Fifth International Conference of the followers of Henry George, under the banner of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade.

It may be said with moderation that this Conference was, in many respects, the most important of its kind yet held. The ordinarily conservative British press gave a great amount of publicity to the proceedings from day to day, especially outside of London, in such centers of population as Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow and Edinburgh. But even in London importance was attached to the Conference by the great London *Times* which on the day after the opening address of President Hennessy of New York, reviewing the critical political and economic conditions of the world, gave prominent news lead to the subject—and on succeeding days had fairly adequate reports of the proceedings.

It should be said that the Conference was notable also for the excellence and importance of the addresses made, and the active and interesting discussions that were evoked by the consideration of the more important topics. The president's address on This Discontented World is printed elsewhere in this issue.

The fact that the Conference was dealing in the main with discussions relating to the economic causes of war and industrial depression, with incidental references to the class struggle going on in Spain, may have accounted for the interest of the British press in the proceedings.

Through the commendable foresight and enterprise of the Managing Committee of the Conference, and the Secretaries Messrs. Arthur Madsen and F. C. R. Douglas, neatly printed copies of the scheduled Conference addresses were circulated in advance of delivery. A valuable paper by Hon. Lawson Purdy of New York which had not been printed in advance, was also provided by cyclostyle process for the delegates. These printed papers will constitute for interested Georgeists a most valuable collection.

They will shortly be on sale by the Henry George Foundation of Great Britain. It is hoped that quantities of these may be on hand and procurable of the Schalkenbach Foundation in this city.

SOME NOTABLE ADDRESSES

Not to mention the keynote address of the President of the Conference, which received so much publicity, there were other most notable addresses fit to be retained among the permanent literature of the Georgeist movement. Distinguished among these might be mentioned the message delivered by Bue Bjorner, a substantial business man of Copenhagen, who made a most incisive analysis of the extraordinary trade restrictions set up for the control of exports and imports by the Danish Govern-

ment four and one-half years ago. The entire foreign trade of the kingdom has been put under the control of a department of the Danish National Bank. A doubling by Germany of tariffs affecting the imports of Danish butter and other produce, and adverse currency conditions affecting Danish exchange, were some of the reasons for the setting up of the extraordinary regulation of both imports and exports adopted by the Danes. The theory behind these regulations was a safeguarding of the Danish currency system, and a desire to improve employment and production, while giving the Danish controllers of the elaborate restriction system opportunity to make advantageous trade bargains with other countries. The system was complicated in detail and put the whole import trade of the country under the control of office functionaries who had little understanding of trade practices and needs. The result of the operation of the system, Mr. Bjorner demonstrated, was not only a failure to accomplish what was aimed at, but to greatly restrict and hamper merchants of the country in their normal business, and make what was a temporary industrial depression into a permanent one.

STATE INTERFERENCE IN INDUSTRY

In the same direction as the address of Mr. Bjorner was one upon the evil economic effects of State-imposed regulations and interference with natural processes in the economic world, by H. Kolthek of Groningen, Holland, a recognized student of international questions. "That in these days Europe stands shuddering again at the brink of war," said Mr. Kolthek, "is in no slight degree the consequence of the way in which governments have meddled with the normal economic life of their people." In Holland and elsewhere, it was pointed out, the whole mass of relief measures imposed upon the people involved repeated infringements of the natural order and of personal liberty. Often the unemployed had to submit to humiliating control of their dealings. In exchange for subsidies farmers had to agree to all sorts of regulations for the management of their farms. Many industries that received direct or indirect government aid must adhere to stipulations regarding their working methods, the kind of things produced, and their quantity and price. It was not strange then, Mr. Kolthek declared, that government intervention involved stupidity, incompetence and sometimes venality in the public control of private business—all of it ending in larger burdens of taxes and prices upon the mass of the population.

LAND QUESTION IN RUSSIA

One of the most interesting addresses was made by M. Daudé-Bancel, the editor of *Terre et Liberté*, Paris, his topic being the evolution of the land ownership system

in Russia. He spoke in French, quite eloquently, and a rendering in English was made to the Conference by a British schoolmaster, Mr. Frank McEachran. It was a most scholarly dissertation. In old Russia, under the Czar, the system of private land monopoly was very bad, and there was a passionate yearning by the *mujik* or peasant class to possess a bit of land. The Soviet Government after the Revolution failed to carry out any really fundamental land reform, but under the pretext of achieving Marxism, they put in operation the most extensive experiment of State Capitalism ever conceived. The land of Russia was partitioned for the benefit of the *mujiks* without plan or method. The uneducated peasants were unprepared for Communist life, and in most cases unfitted to replace the old landed proprietors whose estates had been confiscated and split up. The result was disorder all over Russia, and famine as its inevitable consequence. The Soviet dictatorship has more than once modified the details of the collectivist farms now owned by the government, but operated by large cooperative groups in which individual ownership in the farming regions is strictly limited. The *mujik* can own no more than his family house with a small garden or orchard attached, his fowls, and a single cow. If he had more than one cow he was considered a *kulak*, and treated as such. When the government in 1928-1929, in face of the insolvency of the peasants, saw their incapacity to guarantee normal production, they proceeded to collectivise the lands of the *mujiks*. There was resentment, because the Russian peasant desired above all things individual property in land. The more intelligent and prosperous of the peasants incited the poor *mujiks* to strike and to produce only enough for the needs of their own families. The leaders of the rebels though most of them lived in a small and moderate way, employing little hired labor, were officially designated as *kulaks*. These leaders of the revolt against State bureaucracy were punished terribly. About 2,500,000 of them were expropriated from their possessions, and scattered across the country with or without their families. Since then the government has modified its land policy in some favorable respects. It is difficult to summarize M. Daudé-Bancel's paper which ought to be read by everyone interested in the Russian land question.

ESTIMATE OF HENRY GEORGE

A remarkable survey of the life, character and influence of Henry George was contained in an Address by Jakob E. Lange of Denmark, the scholarly translator of "Progress and Poverty," into Danish. In the absence of Mr. Lange on account of poor health, this paper was read acceptably by Lange's countryman, Bue Bjorner. The conclusion was eloquent:

"This then is the answer to the Sphinx's riddle: Equality, Freedom, Justice, Peace—call it what you like, these

are only different aspects of the same thing; these are the true life-giving elements of human progress, the real pillars of human society. Followers of our great leader! This is the message to a world seemingly nearer at its fall than even Henry George saw it, but also with a grander future in store for it if true liberty and equality can be secured to call forth that brotherhood of man which alone can be the foundation stone of a new and higher, firmer universal humanity."

THE QUESTION OF COLONIES

A striking address was that of Mr. Ole Wang of Tonsberg, Norway, dealing comprehensively with the demand of certain nations, notably Germany, Italy and Japan, for Colonies. Mr. Wang spoke in excellent English, and held the close attention of a large audience. He examined the reasons ordinarily advanced for pushing the demand for Colonial possessions, and showed, categorically, the essential weakness and unreality of these demands. Ordinarily, it is claimed that certain nations must have Colonies in order that they may obtain supplies of raw materials for their industries; or that they must have markets for the surplus products of their industries; or that they must have room for increasing populations. Mr. Wang examined these contentions one by one in masterly detail, with conclusions acceptable to his audience, that destroyed the basic claims of nations to Colonial possessions. In view of the Italian defence of the brutal conquest of Ethiopia, and the recent demand of Herr Hitler for the return of the Colonies taken from Germany by the Treaty of Versailles, Mr. Wang's address in refutation of the usual expansionist theories seemed particularly valuable at this time.

LAND RIGHTS IN BRITISH COLONIES

A most interesting session was that presided over by Col. Josiah C. Wedgwood, M.P., to whom the audience gave a rousing welcome, the warmth of which was due, perhaps, to the fact that Col. Wedgwood had recently recovered from a serious illness. Under the title of "Colonial Systems of Land Tenure and Taxation" he delivered an interesting review of the land system that has been in operation in Northern Nigeria since 1910 when, through his influence as a member of a Government Committee, there was adopted the ordinance that insured to the natives the rights of the people to their land. "It is of little use," Col. Wedgwood said, "taking credit for the abolishing of chattel slavery if, with our eyes open, we allow economic slavery to take the place of the old outworn forms of compulsory labor. There is a slavery which locks up men's bodies; and there is a 'freedom' which indeed sets men's bodies free but locks up all they need for subsistence. We must emphasize that land in all colonies must be held in trust forever

ventured the prophecy, because of the lack of understanding and faith in the philosophy of freedom, that men would grow more accustomed to reliance upon the State for the working out of individual and national destiny. "We must note in the light of past experience," said Mr. McEachran, "that Marxist Communism appears to be the culmination of the evolution of a century, even if we think it is an undesirable culmination. The growth of land monopoly, of tariffs, of quotas, of currency restrictions, of taxation, etc., widening and hardening the hindrances to the free production, and leading to great relative poverty and unemployment—all point in the same direction. The worker, unable to find work, and the employer, unable to sell his goods, both appeal to the State and find in it their only salvation." The concluding sentence of an eloquent peroration was this: "The ancient world, with all its cultural splendor, died of the slave monopoly of Rome: let us beware lest our own die from a similar cause."

HENRY GEORGE SCHOOL

One of the most notable sessions of the Congress was that devoted to a discussion of the Henry George School of Social Science of New York, at which Miss Helen Denbigh delivered a moving testimony to the success of the New York School. She was roundly applauded at the conclusion. She was followed by Lancaster Greene of New York, a trustee and volunteer teacher of the School. His address was listened to with the greatest of interest and he afterwards effectively answered many questions from the floor. Mr. Greene's capacity for salesmanship and his intense earnestness captured the crowd. It is now understood that several Extension Classes of the School are soon to be established in Great Britain. The first class, with Leon MacLaren, the son of Andrew MacLaren, the well known M.P., has already got under way in London. There can be no doubt that the International Conference was a worth-while event, if for no other reason than that it proved to be the beginning of the extension of the New York School movement on the European continent. Already classes are being formed in Denmark and Holland.

ON HENRY GEORGE'S BIRTHDAY

The evening of September 2, anniversary of Henry George's birthday, was celebrated in the Conference Hall by a large gathering. President Hennessy in opening the proceedings quoted from the noble prophecy of Rabbi Gottheil at the funeral of Henry George. He pointed to the realization in the audience before him representing a number of European countries, of the truth of the prophecy.

Mr. R. R. Stokes, a well known London business man, gave an admirable address, followed by the reading of the address (already referred to) prepared for the occasion by the veteran Jakob E. Lange of Denmark. In his

absence on account of illness, the tribute was read with fine effect by Bue Bjorner, Mr. Lange's countryman. The proceedings were fittingly closed by an eloquent appeal address from Henry George's daughter, Anna George de Mille.

At the election of the officers at the close of the Conference President Hennessy declined re-election, but was complimented by the Conference by being selected as Honorary President or President Emeritus. The new President is Mr. Bue Bjorner of Copenhagen, a young man of outstanding ability and business experience, filled with enthusiasm for the Georgeist faith. President Hennessy paid a warm tribute to the character and ability of his successor. Mrs. Anna George de Mille was elected as one of the Vice-Presidents, and Hon. James Blauvelt, Hon. Lawson Purdy and Leonard Recker were elected to the Executive Committee of the Union.

GEORGEIST IDEAS IN MANY LANGUAGES

It must be said that the Conference arrangements were most excellent, thanks largely to the activities of Messrs. Madsen and Douglas, the secretaries. The organizers had not only circulated advance copies of the printed addresses of those in attendance, but had mailed many of them to numerous societies and associations. One document in this connection deserved particular notice, namely, a reprint of the comprehensive paper on "The Economic Causes of War and Industrial Depression" which had been circulated at Geneva in a half dozen European languages, and the later memorandum issued at the time of the 1933 economic conference in London, which gathering, it is commonly asserted, was broken up by the word of Mr. Roosevelt to the American delegation not to enter into agreements as to currency stabilization or other international economic agreements.

The wide circulation by the Georgeist Conference of their point of view on world economic questions helped considerably in preparing for the remarkable publicity which the Conference achieved.

The Land Question in Spain

THE Spanish peasant, for generations, has suffered from "land hunger" just as the French and Russian peasants did before their revolutions. The land was held almost entirely by a small section of the community. They were immensely wealthy, while the peasant was desperately poor. In many parts of Spain the peasants received little or no education, and the amount of illiteracy was a disgrace to the country.

The government, therefore, decided that the land must be more evenly distributed. They didn't seize or confiscate it, but they bought it from the great landowners at the value which the landowners themselves had decided was just, when it was a question of taxation. In other words, the owners having assessed their land at a low value in order for years to pay the smallest possible taxes to the government were given that value for the land when the government decided to buy it from them—a decision in no way contravening the law of justice.

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