

THREE COUNTRIES VISITED

Mr. Pavlos Giannelias has, since 1939, been resident in France. At our International Conference in Copenhagen, 1916, and Edinburgh, 1929, he officially represented the Greek Government, and was also representative of Austria in his capacity as member of the Austrian Land Reformers Union. In March, 1948, and again this year, he was able to revisit Austria. His travels in these years took him also to Switzerland and Liechtenstein. He writes interestingly of the contacts he made, of old acquaintances met, of conversations with prominent personalities and of colleagues sadly missed who could no longer be greeted. He spoke with many who were known by exchange of letters in a considerable correspondence. It was in a real sense a missionary journey, with no opportunity overlooked to make opinion for the Henry George social philosophy and its practical application, in which the "lesson of Denmark" played a large part. Mr. Giannelias was present at the International Town Planning Congress in Zürich in June, 1948, and repeatedly attracted the attention of the members by his insistence upon the abolition of taxes upon houses and the work of man's hands, substituting for them taxation upon the value of land alone. He had intimate discussion with Dr. Etter and Dr. Nobs, Swiss Presidents, in 1947 and 1949 respectively; with Dr. Lincke, Chief of the Finance Department in Berne, and with Prof. Dr. Giterman, the taxation authority in the National Assembly.

Passing through Liechtenstein, "the lovely little Principality," Mr. Giannelias had valuable talks in Vaduz with Mr. Sele, the Commissioner of Taxation, one of his "victims" whom he left impressed with the theories for which Georgeists stand.

In Vienna, which suffered such tragic destruction, progress in rebuilding was very marked. Visit to that city (where Mr. Giannelias had his home, but had to escape from the Nazi terror, becoming a refugee in France) memory was recalled of the esteemed colleague, Professor Siegfried Sitte, whose grandfather was one of the architects in the restoration of St. Stephen's and the father was Camillo Sitte, the pioneer of Town Planning science. Siegfried Sitte, the last President of the Austrian (Georgeist) Land Reformers Union, which in 1939 was disbanded by the Nazis, died in 1945. Two of his most active co-workers, Dr. Schwarzl and Philipp Knab, are now busy preparing for publication the manuscript of his work on political economy, which will deserve a high place in the literature of the Georgeist movement. That the year-long work of the Austrian Land Reformers Union has not been altogether in vain was found in the sympathetic attitude of two prominent and influential personalities, Dr. Melzer, the Burgermaster of Innsbruck, and Dr. Hartmann, the President of the Peasants' Association. They are very much alive to the urgency of land value taxation in substitution for the tax burdens that now so heavily affect production and the working people. Present ills and injustices are not to be removed or even palliated by devices like rent restriction and arbitrary fixation of prices. The high-sounding "rent protection," as it is called, with all its false promises paraded also in Switzerland and in France is "protection" only for those who have been in occupation a number of years. The new would-be tenant, seeking a home on marriage or driven into lodgings because of the house scarcity, is compelled in all these countries to pay as much for a single room for three or four months as the happy beneficiary of rent restriction pays in yearly rent for a whole house. "We may be still far from our goal, but we do not give up hope that our efforts will ultimately be crowned with success."

LIBERAL LIBERTY LEAGUE

(Communicated by Mr. Stephen Martin, Joint Hon. Secretary.)

Work in connection with the collection of signatures to the Petition to the House of Commons which the Liberal Liberty League is organising is gathering momentum and up to date the total number of signatures received is close on 1,000.

The Petition sets forth as follows:—

The Humble Petition of the undersigned sheweth, that the recognition of the inalienable human right of all men to be able to produce, own, sell and otherwise dispose of the products of their labour without let or hindrance from any man, is funda-

mental to the full attainment of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

And Whereas the continuing denial to the people of this right is subjecting them to injustice and economic privation.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that the House of Commons will alleviate this grievance:—

1. By removing all restrictions to the free importation of food, goods, and raw materials.
2. By abolishing all taxes levied on the rewards of labour and the products and processes of industry.
3. By the enactment of legislation so that the revenue required for national and local services shall be obtained by taxing and rating the value which attaches to land apart from the buildings thereon.
4. By reducing the powers of government to the minimum requisite for the preservation of law and order.

Most of the Liberal Associations in England, Scotland and Wales have received petition forms and whilst a few are helping the response in that quarter so far has been disappointing.

A letter has been received from the Liberal Party Organisation headquarters stating that they are sending the following directive to those associations who ask for guidance on the matter of the petition. This letter reads:—

"We cannot recommend associations to assist in organising this petition for the following reasons:—

- (a) It is impossible to remove all restrictions to the free importation of food, goods and raw materials while the existing currency difficulties remain (*See Petition, Prayer No. 1*).
- (b) The abolition of all taxation "levied on the rewards of labour and the products and processes of industry" would reduce the national revenue by anything between £1,600 and £2,000 millions and, with the operation of the Town and Country Planning Act, we cannot see that this revenue can be made up by taxing and rating the value which attaches to land apart from the buildings thereon. (*Prayers Nos. 2 and 3*.)

We feel further that Petitions to the House of Commons should not be used for the purpose of trying to frame a Party Programme"

In view of this denial by the Party Headquarters of the traditional and fundamental principles of Liberalism a follow-up letter has been sent to the Liberal Associations, pointing out:—

(a) That currency regulation by the Government is as great an impediment to Free Trade as Tariffs or any other devices used for Protectionist reasons.

(b) To-day's colossal State expenditure is in marked contrast to the continuing poverty of the individuals composing it and to question whether the taxation of the site value of land could produce such enormous sums of money is invidious. Alternatively, it is highly probable that the existing sources of revenue will prove incapable of meeting future increases in the cost of State paternalism. Coupled with a ruthless pruning of much of the Government's economic activities and administrative expenditure (comparable to that practised by individuals in family budgeting) there is not the slightest doubt that the rating and taxation of land values could as a single tax provide the necessary revenue. The iniquitous Town and Country Planning Act with its arbitrary development charges and assessment of existing use value is causing an almost complete standstill in private housing and general economic development and is proof of our contention that whoever controls the use of land possesses the greatest power over the lives of the peoples; it must be repealed.

Finally, it is complete nonsense to say that petitions should not be used to frame party programmes. Or has the Liberal Party Headquarters forgotten that in 1938 they organised a petition to the "Commons" calling for "the removal of tariffs and trade restrictions"?

Whether all Liberal Associations will obey the treacherous directive from headquarters or act according to the dictates of their Liberal conscience remains to be seen. But one thing is certain, the issue is clear and all members of the Liberal Liberty League are urged to put all they have into making a success of this petition.