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"You Will Have to Get Help from the Land"

In 1905, because Sumpner's Farm was proving too small for its importance as an experiment, Fels wrote to the Poplar Union's Guardians of the Poor: "The pressing need would, therefore, appear to be *land,* and having this in mind, and having some time ago purchased the Basildon Farm, which is situated about two miles from Wickford Station, . . . I offer your Board 400-500 acres of the 535 acres, which is the extent of the farm, provided that, in the event of its final purchase, its use shall be continuous as a farm labour colony, or for the employment of labour on the land, either by your Board or any succeeding public body."

The Poplar Farms Committee inspected the Basildon estate early in October, and a few days later went over a farm known as "Nipsell's," which Fels also owned, situated in the parish of Mayland, Essex, about 4 miles from Southminster and Althorn and 45 miles from London. The Committee decided that the latter farm was preferable, being "particularly adapted for

the purpose of a labour colony," and Fels agreed to transfer it to the Guardians on the same general terms as the transfer of the Laindon property. As for Laindon itself, Fels offered to pay £1,000 to the Guardians for the improvements that had been made at Sumpner's Farm, to permit them to remove the temporary iron buildings and fittings erected during their occupancy, and to pay to the Guardians any profit beyond the original purchase price and the sum of £1,000 which he might realize from the sale of the property. The cost of Nipsell's Farm to Fels had been £3,701. By accepting his offer the Guardians would acquire a labor colony nearly five times larger than their present site at an outlay of only £575 more than the purchase price of the Laindon property. At Nipsell's Farm there were 488 acres of arable, if poor, land and pasturage, a large residence, extensive farm buildings, and 2 cottages. There were far greater facilities for employment than at Sumpner's Farm, as well as other advantages, such as an artesian well and a plentiful supply of water, and 4 miles of frontage on the tidal Blackwater River, with 2 wharves to provide docking facilities for the transport of produce, supplies, and manure.

In recommending the purchase of Nipsell's Farm on the terms stated by Fels, George Lansbury declared that there were 346 persons above the total certified accommodation overcrowding Poplar's workhouse and sick asylum. "By providing for all able-bodied men away from the workhouse at Poplar," he stated, "further accommodation for the aged and infirm would be available in that institution, and the present proposal appears to us to offer the most economical and satisfactory method of attaining this object." The trouble with the Fels-Lansbury proposal for a new and larger labor colony at Nipsell's Farm, however, was funda-

mentally the same as that which plagued the Laindon Colony. Both arrangements violated England's workhouse principles of Poor Law relief of destitution. The kingdom's traditions and customs of administering poverty stood in the way of improving the condition of the poor. The Poor Law itself was an oppressor of the poor.

The true temper of the wind into which Fels and Lansbury were heading had struck them in May 1905, when a prejudicial police report was voluntarily entered by the Essex constabulary against the inmates of Laindon, "the majority of whom have a criminal record, and in most cases are idle and disorderly persons who have no desire to work for a livelihood."[1]

These accusations were incorporated within the scope of an extraordinary inquiry "both as to the special circumstances of Poplar and as to the general administration of the Poor Law in that union," conducted by Mr. J. S. Davy, C.B., Chief General Inspector for the Local Government Board, during the spring and early summer of 1906.

Mr. Davy charged that Lansbury "considered himself an advocate of a policy first and a representative to the ratepayers afterwards." Lansbury's policy of administering relief was most unfortunate, Davy went on, in that it had not led to any general improvement among the poor of Poplar Union but to "the general pauperisation of the inhabitants" instead, owing, as Davy had contended publicly even before he began his investigation, to the Guardians' profligate discharge of their responsibilities. The Local Government Board must alert itself "how far the increase in pauperism and its accompanying growth of the poor rates is likely to go," he warned. He further reported that "Mr. Lansbury says that, in a district like Poplar, pauperism

[the total of persons receiving public relief] is bound to grow, and that the only real permanent remedy is socialism. . . ."

The Right Hon. John Burns, M.P., the new president of the Local Government Board, agreed with Davy. Burns, the successor to Walter Long and Gerald Balfour, both of whom had entertained more sympathetic views, was a self-educated Scottish engineer who had paralyzed shipping in London in 1889 by leading a strike of 50,000 unskilled longshoremen. Nonetheless, he and the majority of the Local Government Board opposed any leniency in Poor Law relief. Sumpner's Farm at Laindon, in their view, was merely a branch of the Poplar workhouse "hired" to shelter able-bodied paupers. It was not regarded by them, as it was by Fels and Lansbury, as the beginning of a bold experiment upon the overall problems caused by unemployment. Such a farm could be operated, according to Inspector Davy, "only under the Modified Workhouse Test, under which the Guardians take a man into the workhouse and give out-door relief to his family, for they had no authority to use Laindon other than as a workhouse or to receive there other than pauper cases." Laindon had caused trouble from the outset, the Inspector's report went on: "Many of the men sent from the workhouse were of bad character and had been inmates for many years. There was no wall around the establishment by which the men could be kept in at night, and they were allowed to go out after working hours. The staff too was not sufficient perhaps for the supervision of this class of inmates.

"And finally," Mr. Davy concluded, in an unmistakable allusion to Joseph Fels, "some well-meaning but mistaken person allowed pocket money of 6d. per week to each inmate."[2]

Hopes for remedying Poplar's distress focused now upon the acquisition of Nipsell's Farm, and the Guardians, in a letter from J. T. McCarthy, chairman of the Workhouse Visiting Committee, pointed out to the Local Government Board that they had devoted "considerable attention" toward finding "a more rational method" of dealing with able-bodied jobless persons, "in order that by employing them in useful and instructive work they might eventually be enabled to become self-supporting." But then the Guardians compromised their original arrangement with Fels: "They hope that it will be possible to avoid complicating the position by the introduction of the unemployed as was the case at Laindon, but that only able-bodied men becoming chargeable [paupers] in the ordinary way would be dealt with. . . ."

After inspecting Nipsell's Farm, however, the Local Government Board refused to approve the proposal, saying that "there would be many difficulties in connection with the use of the land for Poor Law purposes." The capstone of the Board's displeasure with Poplar and Poplarism fell into place in November 1906: "If . . . the Guardians still deem it necessary that the branch workhouse at Laindon should be retained for the present, the Board would be willing to assent to a renewal of the Guardians' occupation of that branch workhouse for a limited time, but on condition that the institution is administered as a workhouse for the able-bodied in the usual way." A month later, the Board wrote that it was unwilling to purchase Laindon at that time, but stated again that "if arrangements could be made for the further temporary occupation of the farm, they would be prepared to assent to such occupation for a limited time."

When Lansbury asked Fels to agree, Fels refused:

> I desire to emphasize that my offer of the farm in the first instance was not for the purpose of establishing a branch workhouse and that way perpetuate stone-yards, oakum picking, corn grinding, and other useless tasks, which seem to be all the Local Government Board want to do. On the contrary, I hoped that your Board would be allowed to try to re-establish men who were down on their luck. With this end in view, I bought other farms in Essex and elsewhere, so as to have them ready for the men (and women too, if it could be arranged), who passed the Laindon Farm; and eventually, either through the efforts of public-spirited men, or from public funds, to place the men on small holdings. I never for one moment dreamed that your Board would be forced to keep 150 men on 100 acres of land, it being obvious to me then, as now, that neither men nor staff could have a chance under such conditions. . . . I take this opportunity . . . to further say that, although the Local Government Board has stifled and made useless this experiment, I am convinced that some such Poor Law reform is bound to come. If anything will help to solve your difficulties in this problem, you will have to get help from the land.

And then he relented. He agreed to extend the Poplar Guardians' tenancy of Sumpner's Farm for a period fixed at one year. He further wrote that he had put a scheme into operation for the cultivation and development of Nipsell's Farm which necessitated the withdrawal of his offer to sell part of that land to the Guardians, though the Basildon Farm and a neighboring estate could still be acquired by them from him if desired.

The Local Government Board permitted the Guardians to exercise their option of purchase for the Laindon farm, but only on the stipulation that the property be operated solely as a subsidiary or classification

workhouse. The occupations prescribed for its inmates included precisely those which Fels and Lansbury had sought to avoid: matmaking, sackmaking, stocking weaving, and corn grinding. On March 19, 1908, after a formal tenancy of four years, the Poplar Guardians completed the purchase of their new workhouse property, and conveyed their "best thanks" to Joseph Fels "for his public-spirited action and great kindness in allowing this Board the free use of Sumpner's Farm during the past four years." An experiment that had barely gotten started had come to an end at Laindon, much as a similar experiment—this one at Hollesley Bay—was also fated to do during these same years.[3]

Fels had discovered Hollesley Farm near the village of Hollesley, Suffolk, in the autumn of 1904 through Mr. Goodchild, an agricultural expert sent down by the London County Council to advise him and Lansbury on the development of Laindon Colony. The 1300-acre farm lay within sight of the North Sea, 80 miles from London, and had been operated since 1886 by Colonial College and Training Farms, Ltd., which trained the sons of gentlemen in agricultural skills and estates management. The college was not a financial success, however, and the farm came up for sale. Fels and Lansbury inspected it, and were eager to acquire it, but the price was high—somewhat over £30,000—and there existed no public authority empowered to take it over from them.

Such a body was being formed, however, the London Unemployed Fund. This semi-official organization originated in proposals presented on October 14, 1904, to a Conference of Metropolitan Guardians by the Right Hon. Walter H. Long, M.P., who was the president of the Local Government Board at that time. The

conference itself had been called owing to the widespread agitations set on foot in large part by Lansbury with money supplied by Fels. The main features of the fund to be created by Long's scheme, as Lord Mayor John Pound explained them in his appeal for private donations (an appeal which was to be superseded by the opening of Queen Alexandra's Fund, and by appropriations from the Imperial Exchequer after 1906), were that for the first time in London's history a central representative body was to be organized "for the purpose of dealing thoroughly, on uniform principles, with the problem of the London unemployed as a whole." The main object of the Central Committee which was to be formed would be to ensure that, so far as possible, work should be obtained "for those of the able-bodied unemployed of London, who, though willing to work, are out of employment through no fault of their own." The Executive Commitee of this Central Committee promptly established a Works Committee to carry out schemes of special employment in or near London, and a Working Colonies Committee to carry out schemes in the country involving the temporary housing of the men employed. These ideas were identical with Lansbury's and Fels' own proposals and were undoubtedly originated by them behind the scenes.[4]

George Lansbury, who was Poplar Union's representative on the Central Committee and a close friend of Walter Long, was appointed to the Executive Committee. He was also made chairman of the Working Colonies Committee, the most convenient position to further his and Fels' combined efforts. At the Central Committee's first meeting, he recalled,

> a letter, which had been drafted by me, was read from

> Joe [Fels], offering the Body [London Unemployed Fund] the loan of an estate of 1300 acres for three years free of rent. I rose and quietly moved that this generous offer be accepted, and [C. H.] Grinling of Woolwich, to whom I had previously spoken, seconded it, and before we knew where we were, the motion was carried. I don't believe a single man on the Board except Grinling and I realised what he was doing.

Fels thereupon completed his arrangements to purchase the farm, and the Hollesley Bay Labour Colony was established by the Central Committee of the London Unemployed Fund in February 1905. Fels leased the estate and buildings to the Committee at a peppercorn rent for three years, with the option of purchase at any time within that period. "The question arose whether we could not permanently settle some of the men on the land," George Lansbury observed, ". . . and also whether the estate would remain public property."

Lansbury set to work with Joe's money to agitate for the Unemployed Workmen Bill to superimpose national agencies upon ancient laws throughout England. The women from East and South London marched on Parliament, and on August 11, 1905, the Unemployed Workmen Act was passed, passage being aided by the last-minute support of Joseph Chamberlain. Together, the Central (Unemployed) Body for London and 29 local Distress Committees in the various Metropolitan boroughs and the City formed one of the organizations prescribed by this Act, "with a view to the provision of employment or assistance for unemployed workmen in proper cases" in London. Lansbury and his cohorts persuaded the Central Body, upon its taking the place of the London Unemployed Fund, to assume responsibility for Hollesley Bay Colony.

Fifty-two men were at work there already, while facilities were nearly ready for a total of 350. The first party of men selected by the Central Body and the new Distress Committees went to work at once, side by side with the men already there. Then Joseph Fels came forward again to lend £2,000 for constructing cottages, while another friend of Lansbury's advanced £200 to build a greenhouse.[5]

Guided by Lansbury, who was supported by Fels, the London Unemployed Fund put a two-fold scheme into effect for the Hollesley Bay estate, which rested upon the provision of special work for periods of exceptional distress and the establishment of suitable men and families in agriculture either in England or in Britain's colonies overseas. The second and longer-range plan was the more significant of course. It was Fel's and Lansbury's intention to train selected men for cooperative small holdings, or, whenever men suitable for emigrating turned up, to train them in the skills essential for agricultural careers. Hollesley Bay was by far the biggest and most ambitious farm colony yet attempted in England.

As various reports of the time noted, the London men at Hollesley Bay worked "with a certain amount of ambition and expectancy," this being attributed to the hope held out to those who showed ability and energy that they would ultimately be settled on the land farming their own holdings. The *Daily News* reporter was favorably impressed. The men were readying a field to sow parsnips, "digging it two spits deep," as one of them explained to him, while another gang of enthusiastic cockneys in the adjacent field was sowing potatoes. Onion beds had already been planted, and preparations were under way for beans, peas, lettuce, and radishes. "Some of 'em fares awk'ard, sir," he was in-

formed by an ancient gardener in response to his inquiry. "They does just about know the right end of the spade from the wrong 'un when they first comes down from London," the old countryman asserted from his superior knowledge. "But it's won'erful 'ow soon they gets the knack of it. It's all a-cause o' their being so willin.' "

During their probationary period of up to 16 weeks, the men lived in the dormitory buildings, while their wives and children were supported in London by the Central Body. The men received board and lodging. They also received 6d. per week for incidental expenses (whether Joseph Fels paid this out of his own pocket, as he did at Laindon, was not specified) and minor clothing allowances. A weekly stipend was paid to the wife at home up to a maximum of 17s. 6d. Joseph Fels also sent a German block-building machine to the Hollesley Bay Colony, "with full instructions for working," and he sent a man to the colony who was experienced in erecting concrete buildings to accelerate the progress of the 12 cottages under construction.

Thomas Smith, who was Fels' manager at his newest estate, Nipsell's Farm near Mayland, Essex, where small holdings were being developed experimentallv, was appointed the organizer for market gardens at Hollesley Bay. "I do not think either of us will forget our meeting with Thomas Smith," Lansbury wrote, recalling his and Fels' first encounter with Smith. "The blunt manner in which he wrote us down as people who knew nothing, while his wife fed us with strawberries and cream, is something I cannot describe." Smith was equally blunt about the limitations of Hollesley Bay, particularly its location: "The situation of this colony and its distance from rail make it impossible to grow ordinary market garden produce profitably. The propor-

tionate cost of haulage to the value of a load is far too great. Special cultures are needed, and the value of a load being so much greater the proportionate cost of carting to rail is considerably lessened." Smith recommended the intensive cultivation of mushrooms, fruits, and choice garden produce, expensive items for sale in luxury markets, with lavish use of fertilizers and glass frames to stimulate abundant and early growth. George Lansbury regretted later that this advice was rebuffed by the supervisory officials at Hollesley Bay (and at Laindon, where Smith also assumed an advisory capacity). "He found it rather difficult to get on with the other officials, and consequently we were always in hot water," Lansbury explained. "People everywhere seem to resent brains, and he had new ideas."[6]

Fels wrote directly to the Local Government Board, offering his Basildon estate at Wickford, Essex, on the same terms as for Hollesley Bay except that he proposed to retain 20 per cent of the acreage to experiment with small holdings. Fels also offered an estate of two farms 12 miles from Wye, Kent, adjoining the cultivated lands of the Southeast Agricultural College. His intention here, too, was to train needy men to be self-supporting farmers, after helping to relieve the distress occasioned by their unemployment.

Like Smith, Fels had brains and new ideas; he also had money, and there was resentment. At a meeting of the Distress Committee of Stratford, for instance, after a certain Mr. Kemsley presented testimony contrary to a proposal by Fels for a land colony, the record shows the following exchange:

> *Mr. Fels* said he did not agree with the opinions of the expert because they were not actual facts. . . . Two hundred men could be put on the land, the arable land

could be broken up and the pasture land could all be cultivated. They could grow fruit there. He had communicated with the Essex County Council asking them to put ditches in the main road to drain the ground. . . . *Mr. Paul* stated that on the farm Mr. Fels offered to the West Ham Board of Guardians he wanted to occupy the valuable frontage himself. *Mr. Fels:* "Who says that?" *Mr. Paul:* "That is what you told the Board of Guardians." *Mr. Fels:* "That is absolutely untrue." *Mr. Paul:* "Do you say that is untrue? Do you deny the truth of my statement?" . . . *Mr. Fels* said it was no use putting two hundred men on the land unless they placed some incentive before them. He was to retain 20 per cent of the land to provide plots on which were to be erected buildings to be let for small holdings. He did not hope to make any money out of it. He made money out of his business. He was not speculating in property. He reserved the right to be believed until they proved him, to be a liar.

About the same time, at a conference held in London by the Sociological Society, Fels denounced the Salvation Army's scheme to remedy unemployment by sponsoring emigration to Canada. To the novelist, H. Rider Haggard, who supported emigration, Fels retorted that it would be better to seek domestic solutions for England's unemployment. The cause of poverty was private ownership of land, he said. It did not matter whether there was protection or free trade. People were crowding into the towns because monopolistic landlords made life so horrible in the rural districts. There were 20,000,000 acres of unused land in England, Fels said, much of which could be cultivated profitably. He knew it. He had been offered opportunities to purchase a great deal of it. Emigration was justly unpopular. "Let us colonize our own country," he concluded.[7]

Fortunately, Fels' official involvement at the Hollesley Bay Labour Colony was fairly brief, unlike his prolonged anguish over Laindon. Negotiations proceeded directly to terminate the interim arrangements, and the purchase took place on January 18, 1907. The amount paid to Fels was £33,000, of which £2,000 over and above the property's original cost represented his loan to build cottages. The Central Unemployed Body unanimously resolved "to recognize their indebtedness to Mr. Fels for his generous and kindly treatment in connection with the Hollesley Bay estate," and it placed on record their "sincere appreciation of the same."

Meanwhile, John Burns, the president of the Local Government Board, was stepping in elsewhere, as he was doing at Laindon, to block acquisitions by local authorities of any more farm properties along the outlines proposed by Fels and Lansbury. Burns, whose fame still rests on his leadership of the striking dockworkers, was elected as a socialist, a member of the Social Democratic Federation, to the first London County Council, and next, in 1892, at the same time as Keir Hardie, to Parliament as an independent Labourite, retaining his councilmanic seat as was customary. He graduated to Liberal-Radical factional politics by way of the metropolitan Progressive party within the London County Council. Then Burns won his strategic portfolio as president of the Local Government Board in Campbell-Bannerman's Cabinet of 1906, which he preserved in its Liberal successor under Prime Minister Herbert Asquith after Campbell-Bannerman's death in 1908.

The Working Colonies Committee of the Central Unemployed Body for London had been carrying out the program laid down within a month of the opening of Hollesley Bay Labour Colony by the London Un-

employed Fund, with the Unemployed Workmen Act and the regulations set forth by the Local Government Board providing the means for carrying out this program, a program that conceived of the two-fold function of the colony as a place of temporary employment and as a school of agricultural training. The program led to the distinction between "selected" men and "non-selected" men, and to prospects for "settlement" on small holdings, with the 12 cottages provided by Joseph Fels conceived of as a "small preparation" for the Colony's "primary object," which was to train men and their families for country life and establish them in independence. Consequently a delegation headed by George Lansbury had submitted a plan on September 28, 1906, for the development of Hollesley Bay which proposed to erect 100 cottages for training, to erect greenhouses and forcing beds, and to maintain the colony for 350 men for the next 6 months. But John Burns as president of the Local Government Board refused to sanction the erection of cottages for smallholders at Hollesley Bay. The reason he gave to the Central Body was that the proposal for settling families upon small holdings departed from the original purpose of the Colony. Such a program was never contemplated by the Unemployed Workmen Act, he stated, that Act being intended to provide temporary relief only.

The Central Unemployed Body appealed to Burns to reverse his decision, pointing out that 11 families were housed already in the Colony's cottages, and that 52 heads of families were on the selected list awaiting their chances for smallholdings and the consequent reunion of their families. The Body noted that in every instance the Local Government Board had been kept fully informed of these developments and intentions. Burns refused.

He was then asked whether the Local Government Board would sanction the purchase by the Central Body of any estate for the establishment of small holdings to be farmed cooperatively, and to this, too, Burns' reply was flatly negative, with the chilling admonition that no portion of Hollesley Bay Colony could be allocated for such purpose. Advertisements were then inserted in leading newspapers to try to secure situations in the country for the men on the selected list, but except for two or three men this attempt failed. The chief objection to the men was the large size of their families. Some of the best men returned prematurely to London "thoroughly discouraged at having the hopes which had been raised in their minds with respect to settlement on the land defeated," George Lansbury sadly recorded. "All we could do was to emigrate the men. This is always a most unsatisfactory ending to social work, and it took the heart out of all of us reducing Hollesley Bay to an institution a little superior to a workhouse."

John Burns seems to have been elevated far above his abilities. He was dominated by the civil servants under his authority, though pridefully claiming to be a strong man and boasting his working-class origin and principles. He was a jealous egoist who tolerated no opposition to his dictates, while upholding the traditional bureaucratic persuasions of his subordinates. This former socialist in his eminence as a Liberal minister upheld the narrowest principles of workhouse relief, even refusing in 1909 to sign the Webbs' Minority Report on the Poor Laws. In 1916 Mary Fels denounced him bitterly:

> It is difficult even now to estimate the harm done to the cause of progress by this one man. So long a follower and bearer of the flag of democracy, he entered the

> Cabinet as the representative of the people. It was thought that now the dumb masses had their spokesman in high places, that injustice and oppression could claim attention at the very fount of power, that the liberal cause had at last definitely joined hands with that of the working multitude. Instead of that, England has witnessed for nearly a decade the administration of a government department, utterly oblivious of the tendency of the time, deaf to every suggestion of reform, blind to everything that might disturb the established order, so filled with venomous reaction that it has become an odious thing to the minds of all who wanted to help the lot of the poor.

John Burns had become a frustrating enigma to his contemporaries, and he remains one to the present day.[8]

His plans frustrated by Burns both at Laindon and Hollesley Bay, as well as his hopes for Basildon and Wye, where he had altered his earlier offer to propose a colony for women, Fels started to go ahead on his own in 1906 developing small holdings for another back-to-the-land approach to the problem of unemployment. His site was Nipsell's Farm at Mayland, the farm he had unsuccessfully offered for the purpose of establishing a labor colony along experimental lines to various local authorities, including the boards of Guardians of Poplar and West Ham and the Central Unemployed Body.

He was convinced that agricultural land was needed not only for paupers and unemployed workers, but for many other men and women as well whose hunger for the land and country life caused them to yearn for small farms of their own. Many of these persons had money enough to rent and cultivate a little land, but because of the landlordism prevailing in England they

were not permitted to. Fels determined to establish small holdings himself, hoping that his example might spread throughout the country generally.[9]

Purchased by Fels in 1905, Nipsell's 630 acres consisted almost entirely of heavy clay loam atop clay subsoil, and, except for its tidal frontage of salt marshes along the river Blackwater, the farm, with its fields, buildings, and cottages, was fast going to ruin, even though still under cultivation. Most of the neighborhood had degenerated into a nursery for weeds and thistles and a hunting-ground for rabbits. Fels engaged Thomas Smith to renovate the derelict estate, the goal being to determine the profitability of small holdings under a system of market-garden cultivation different from England's custom, and Smith proceeded to lay out 21 small holdings of from 5 to 10 acres of land each. Substantial yet compact houses with 5 rooms and essential outbuildings were constructed on each holding, and before any holding was settled, 2 of its acres were thoroughly cultivated, manured, and planted with fruit trees and bushes. The total cost worked out to about £700 a holding, and the rent for each was set from £26 to £30 a year. A tenant could live rent-free on his holding for the first year; the second year he was expected to pay one-half of the rent: the third year, three-quarters; the full amount the fourth year, and to make up any deficiency after that in quarterly installments plus simple interest calculated at 4 per cent. The arrangement was intended to provide adequate opportunity to bring each tenant's holding into profitable productivity before his capital was exhausted.

Tenant farmers possessing capital of their own were neither paupers nor among the ordinary category of unemployed with whom Fels had been dealing. They represented "a somewhat better type of industrial

product," Mary Fels noted, being drawn as they were from the many hundreds of applications coming from all over the country. Most of the smallholders chosen were townsmen, and few had previous experience with farm life, except as cultivating allotments had provided. Besides these settlers, Fels and Smith chose two families from the ranks of the genuinely unemployed. The heads of these households were inmates of Hollesley Bay Labour Colony who had been thwarted by John Burns' mandates from being installed in the small holdings on that estate. Since they had no capital of their own, Fels had to supply them with all necessaries, and even had to pay them the lowest wages on which they could work their own land, in order to give them a start. Fels' goal for the settlers was to enable them to provide an independent livelihood for themselves. Sales from fruit-growing, bee and pig keeping, and market-garden produce were to be the long-range means to achieve that goal.

Thomas Smith caused a piece of very poor, weedy, wet land at Nipsell's to be drained, manured, and cultivated, and within three years he wrought a near miracle. He was able to demonstrate that apples, plums, currants, gooseberries, strawberries, asparagus, tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, potatoes, peas, beans, lettuces, cabbages, and cauliflower were all growing there to perfection, and that the whole plantation was flourishing "in a healthy and vigorous condition."

More important for instructing the small holders were the two acres of land devoted to intensive market-gardening, or *petite culture maraîchère,* which French experts, Monsieur and Madame Lecoq and their two sons, were brought over in 1907 to introduce at Nipsell's Farm. The essential features of the system were irrigation, lavish manuring, and the raising of crops of supe-

rior quality out of season in rapid succession from the same beds. As Fels' friend, Peter Kropotkin, observed, such practices were typical among market-gardeners in the suburbs of Paris, Rouen, and other large French cities, but uncommon in England. Like its models on the Continent, the French garden at Mayland stressed the use of manure. Annually for the first three years 2,000 tons of good quality stableyard manure were applied to the two acres. This application cost about six shillings a ton. Most of the manure arrived on barges at a wharf bordering the estate. The manure was employed primarily for the gentle and steady heat produced by its fermentation. The growers demonstrated that they could mix manures in varying stages of decay to fend off the weather's chill or to advance or retard their plants, in striving for the maximum gross income from sales. After approximately three years, enough decayed manure would accumulate on top of the natural ground, which was honeycombed with drain pipes, to serve thereafter as the only soil actually in use in the garden.

In early 1907 when the plantings began, three different crops were launched simultaneously. Radish seed was sown thickly, also carrot seed immediately upon the radish seed. These seeds were then covered with fine sifted rotten manure, and the whole layer pressed down level. Nine inches apart upon this foundation were placed small lettuce plants which had been growing under cloches or French bell-glasses. The first radishes were ready for pulling in little more than three weeks, and by the time they had been cleared out the lettuce plants were touching each other. Cauliflower plants were then installed among the lettuces, before the latter were gathered. As the lettuce departed, the carrots—having access to light—speedily filled up the space and the cauliflowers were placed upon other hot

beds, which were filled up with melon plants. Four crops were harvested between February 5 and July 9. The prices realized in London's Covent Garden market were in line with imports from France, and the quality of Mayland's produce compared favorably on its first effort with anything sold there. "Melon-growing in particular has proved a great success," Thomas Smith reported, after the results were in for 1908.

> Many growers thought it impossible, and some scoffed at the idea of growing such tender plants in frames in England, but now it is acknowledged that the melons we have grown are, both in appearance and quality, quite equal and possibly superior to the far-famed French ones. That the public who eat our melons think so may be seen in the fact that they have brought this season a higher price on an average than the imported ones.

On July 25, 1908, the members of the Essex Field Club toured Mayland's "Agricultural Village of Small Holdings and the Windmill Nurseries," as Nipsell's Farm was now known. Joseph Fels joined the party for lunch, which was served in the 7-acre playing field, and Mr. Fels remarked in a brief address that he had encountered an anomalous set of circumstances in England. With a population of over 40 million persons, he found only an infinitesimal number making their living on the land, yet unemployment and land hunger were everywhere. It would be a genuine triumph if his experiment at Mayland proved to be successful, because the land was originally poor. It would demonstrate that agriculture could be successfully instigated almost anywhere. He added that efforts were under way to persuade the holders to cooperate voluntarily in disposing of their produce, and a motor service was being developed to promote that end.

Before the end of 1908, a large building was put up to facilitate marketing arrangements. A cooperative store and post and telegraph offices were already in active operation, and there was a social club with a small lending library attached which was busily frequented during the winter months. There was also a schoolhouse, to which an open-air school was added for use during the summer. All the children attended it, not physical defectives only as was the custom at open-air classrooms operating elsewhere in England. Nature studies were stressed supplementary to the fundamental curriculum, and agriculture was introduced into the primary school as a separate subject. Showers and wash-baths and school gardens were also part of the equipment of the open-air school at Mayland, all of this variously representing influences from the Organic School at Fairhope Colony on Mobile Bay and the school gardens in Philadelphia, as well as the philosophy of the British educational reformer Margaret McMillan, whom Fels had met and was trying to help.[10]

The experiment at Mayland was flourishing, but it was a costly venture. In France, the capital accumulated in *un petite culture maraîchère* from generation to generation; it did not represent one big initial outlay, as when Fels poured something like £25,000 into equipping his agricultural community. Fels' figures revealed that the delays in getting started had aborted the first growing season, and that railway tariffs and wholesalers' commissions were sharply reducing the margin of profit. Worse, Mayland's experimental French gardens were seemingly beyond the modest achievements of the smallholders, who were struggling to cope with rural living, and Fels had to aid them in 1907 with loans, and to reduce their scale of rents.

The rents were revised again the following year, with

the rent for 1907 wholly deferred and only one-half rent to be paid for 1908. For 1909 three-quarters was to be paid and one-quarter deferred, while for 1910 full rent was expected. But in 1910 the smallholders' crops failed, whereupon their burden of debt owing for money advanced and rent due assumed hopeless proportions. Fels offered the discouraged smallholders a choice. Anyone wishing to give up his holding could have a clear discharge of all money borrowed and rents owing and would receive half of the amount of his original capital as a gift. Each holder who chose to remain could live rent-free until Lady Day (March 25) 1911, and if for four successive quarter days thereafter he paid the rent due he would be forgiven all moneys owing up to the time of the offer. About half of the smallholders chose to remain.

Fels was still convinced that a return to agriculture was vital to national life, that agriculture could afford a safety valve for unemployment by installing idle industrial laborers usefully at work on the land, and that it could provide a desirable rural independence for townsmen willing to till the soil for their livelihood, but it was clear to him that he had little or no significant influence over either local authorities or public utilities, by whose policies any landsman's fate could be jeopardized. "Most important of all," his wife continued in describing her husband's thinking, "it became evident that for a number of reasons every smallholder would lie in the hollow of the landlord's hand." That is, that rents would rise to reflect increasing income from the land and its capital worth.

Originally Nipsell's Farm had been obtained for about £8 3s. per acre. After Fels developed his enterprise, adjoining land could not be bought under £14 per acre, though land values did not increase in gen-

eral. The smallholders' own industry and Fels' capital investment had driven up land values for the neighboring landlords, blocking the avenues both to profit and expansion. "Mr. Fels had learned that the score of holdings which he had established and supported could do nothing towards the hundreds of thousands that would be necessary to solve the problem of poverty," his wife concluded. He learned, too, that the Small Holdings and Allotments Act of 1908, on which he had relied briefly because it empowered County Councils and the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries to provide small holdings by loans and grants, would neither make land plentiful nor accessible. Under existing structures of ownership and taxation, even with government aid the smallholder would be forced to assume a burden he could not support.

The lessons taught by Henry George were being driven home to Fels through bitter experience. Paradoxically he had anticipated, if not consciously sought, the very failure which occurred at Mayland. He had been willing to establish a single-tax colony in England along the lines of the experiment at Fairhope, Alabama, but only, he had warned, if anyone could show him that the heavy rates and taxes would not swamp it before it had a fair chance. He had repeated his misgivings in 1907 to Louis F. Post, editor of *The Public*, the major single-tax organ in the United States, avowing that England's system of rates "would quickly tax the experiment out of existence, especially if it should turn out to be a growing success." The Mayland venture was "the nearest thing" to an experiment in the land that would not be killed, in Fels' opinion, yet he could foresee what might be the fate of smallholdings, even in his hopes for their future. "I propose to show by this experiment," he told Post,

> that the value of land all round Mayland will so quickly increase in value that the rents of our tenants, compared with the increased cost outside, will be an object-lesson for the whole district. I am inclined to believe that land immediately around Mayland has already jumped considerably in value, though it is less than two years since the whole farm was practically an abandoned one, so far as productive cultivation was concerned.[11]

Perhaps it was this apprehension of futility that induced Fels to fall-back again onto Hazen Pingree's tried and true palliative of vacant-lots cultivation. Fels had helped to found the Vacant Land Cultivation Society of Great Britain toward the end of 1907,the scheme being imported directly from Philadelphia, and was one of its first secretaries. The Society was established to obtain the free use of land from public authorities or private owners, to prepare it for cultivation by the unemployed, and to provide the necessary instruction and supervision together with seeds, tools, and fertilizers. Fels wrote the London County Council:

> Permission is asked for the use of these lands only so long as they are not required for other purposes, and to be given up on demand. The cultivation of unused plots of land in towns by the unemployed has been successfully carried on in American cities, notably in Philadelphia, New York, Cleveland, Detroit, etc. Last year nearly three hundred acres, loaned by the city as well as by private owners, were cultivated in Philadelphia alone.

The Council took affirmative action on his proposal, and numerous sites were made available. It cannot be ascertained whether the Council was persuaded by Fels' appeal or by its own valuer's opinion that "The occupa-

tion of the land by Mr. Fels might save the Council some expense in watching the land and maintenance of fencing." England's version of "Pingree's potato patches" got under way, but its success was modest by American standards. "It has had an uphill fight against the heedlessness and prejudice which confront innovations in England," a supporter recorded in 1912 after 4 seasons of cultivation, at which point there were 520 plots held by the London Society on 65 acres of land. A considerable area of London's land was also worked by other societies founded directly or indirectly through the initiative of the Vacant Land Cultivation Society. In Dublin a Society was founded after Fels appeared to deliver a personal appeal, and a plan for one was afoot in Edinburgh. There was a flourishing Society in Birmingham, and projects were beginning in Bristol, Sunderland, Leicester, and Northampton. "The Britisher is slow to take up any new ideas," the supporter concluded, "but his motto is, 'When you get hold of a good thing, freeze on to it.' England is freezing on to the idea of getting men back to the land in the cities."[12]

So glacial a pace was too slow for Fels. The only merit of the Vacant Land Cultivation Society in England, as he saw it, was for publicizing the land question. He believed in settling people on the land to cure poverty and related social problems, yet he could not discover how this might be accomplished. The Fairhope Colony on Mobile Bay's eastern shore in Alabama struck him repeatedly during this period of his life as his major success in promoting social reforms, and yet that colony too was having its problems, many of them problems to which, it must be said, Fels contributed.

Fels had been the leading patron of Fairhope since 1899, but his generosity had tended to divide Fairhope's

single-taxers between fundamentalist Georgists on the one hand, who continued to demand that every public service must be underwritten solely by the rents from land, and, on the other, those colonists who welcomed Fels' munificence. The latter group, whose spokesman was Ernest B. Gaston, editor of the *Fairhope Courier,* held that the installation of public services would accelerate the colony's development, even if accomplished through philanthropic means. Rents collected in the future could be applied to redeem the original outlays.

The steamer *Fairhope,* launched in 1901, burned in the autumn of 1905, shortly after undergoing a general overhaul at a cost of $6,000. Most of the original outlay for the boat remained unamortized, as well as the cost of repairs. Nor was the boat insured, despite such a requirement in the trust agreement covering her ownership and operation. Though the creditors for the boat yard and dry dock brought suits at Mobile against the stockholders and principally against Joseph Fels, charging that his backing influenced their decision to extend credit, Fels exonerated the colony from responsibility or liability in the loss of the steamer. According to the *Courier,* December 29, 1905, he said that it was the colony's example that was important, not the boat's burning, and that, "for the money invested and the effort made, Fairhope was doing the most practical and effective reform work being done in the world today."[13]

"I have never in the remotest sense suggested that this colony is going to upset things," Fels began modestly in March 1906, in replying to Cleveland's Mayor Tom L. Johnson, an avowed single-taxer but skeptical of Fairhope's significance, "and while it may not have appealed to you as a practical illustration of what a single-tax colony might do, it is a first-class beginning of proof in that direction."

> The colony has about 2000 acres now. It is administered on single-tax lines to the fullest extent a small community within a State can be administered under existing laws. The land belongs to the body. The entire land rents and income from utilities now amount to about $4000 yearly, which is expended just as it would be expended in a single-tax country. All county schools and State taxes are paid by the community out of the land rentals, and the balance is used for road-making and public improvements. If free water, free schools (in addition to the State half-time schools), free library, free bath-houses, free telephone service, and the best roads of any small community in the South, free wharf for foot passengers and other public utilities, all paid out of land rentals, are not nearly what we are after, I would like to know what is!

Fels confided that he was "quietly picking up additional tracts of land" and predicted that Fairhope's acreage would double within 6 months. This it more than did, with his gift of 2,200 acres.

Eighteen months later Fels justified himself further to one of Fairhope's settlers:

> I should say that my interest in that community has been purely an unselfish one, *i.e.*, what I have done and what I intend to do is solely in the direction of trying to help towards the prosperity of the community as a permanent object-lesson in the direction of the land question.
>
> I have been aware from the first that it was somewhat dangerous for me to advance money or give financial assistance in connection with any industrial enterprises or businesses; and that in so doing I was placing myself in a somewhat questionable light before the general community. When a man invests money in industrial enterprises of whatever character, he is supposed to be

> doing so for the sake of making money; and if he is a man of means it will be generally believed that he is investing his money for the purpose of trying to squeeze other people out of theirs. Indeed I have been cautioned by several people at Fairhope and elsewhere, interested in the progress of the place as a single-tax object lesson, against allowing myself to become too closely identified in money matters with the town and its people. Some have gone so far as to say that I did quite wrong in helping to buy land for the extension of the place. Be that as it may "I have done what I have done," and it must rest at that.

Quite the opposite was the case. Fels was not content just to send his money nor to leave Fairhope's management alone. His visitations were purposeful and time-consuming, though he was a busy man with little time to spare. He wanted Fairhope to flourish as the revealed truth of Henry George, and he sought reassurance that everything was going well.[14]

But doctrinal trouble and intramural fighting had erupted openly at Fairhope as early as 1904, the disagreements that year becoming renowned nationally among single-taxers as "The Fairhope Controversy." Fels was intensifying his promotion of Fairhope's founding purpose by then, as his crossings to and from the United States grew more and more frequent, and he was in accord with most of the colony's governors, which made him a party to their opposition to a minority of antagonists, which included a number of socialists who had joined the colony in 1901, coming from Ruskin Colony in Tennessee.

Three issues were under dispute: (1) Did Henry George's doctrine require the collection of the full annual use value of the land in spite of the wishes of the community for public services? (2) Was it proper

to characterize Fairhope as a single-tax community when it was forced to operate within an overall framework of Alabama's state and local taxation, with taxes actually being levied on improvements to real estate and on personal property? (3) What degree of democracy was essential for the government of the colony in order for Fairhope to harmonize itself with Henry George's stress upon the importance of freedom, when in fact the shareholding members of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation held the power of final decisions instead of the citizenry of the community at large? A fourth problem, a corollary to the others to some extent, raised the issue of managing the colony's land through leases rather than through issuance of private deeds.[15]

Joseph Fels involved himself with each of these controversies as they divided the colonists, and he sparked discords over the library and the school as well. From Fels and Company's home offices in Philadelphia in January 1906, Fels wrote to advise his friend Gaston that Mr. Robert F. Powell, the superintendent of vacant-lands cultivation in Philadelphia, was back from the mission to the colony where he had been dispatched by Fels, "and I am in daily touch with him. Regarding the money I subscribed towards the library, Powell tells me that it is the intention of the colony to ultimately turn that money into the land fund, so that all such things will have been paid for out of land rentals, as it is a public improvement, so it can then be said that gifts have not produced prosperity. Suits me exactly." His philanthropy identified Fels with the faction opposing doctrinal fundamentalism, which made him an enemy in the minds of some colonists.

He also interfered at an early stage in the controversy between Fairhope's corporate members and its

citizens over the degree of democracy necessary for the colony. His dispute was with Prescott A. Parker and Dr. H. S. Greeno. As Parker recalled their exchange of December 1905 to Fels:

> You said that you would give me five hundred dollars to prove that any resident of Fairhope who would sign the proper papers would not be admitted as a member of the Fairhope corporation. I replied that I did not want your money. You insisted, and most emphatically stated that you were not "putting up a bluff," that you desired the evidence, and that you wanted me to have the money, and repeated that you would give me five hundred dollars to furnish you with evidence that any resident of Fairhope could not become a member of the corporation by signing the customary papers and paying the admission fee.

Parker enclosed a certified statement that his friend Dr. Greeno's application for membership in the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation had been rejected. His letter continued:

> Even if your contention was true that any resident could join by paying one hundred dollars, the grievance of the minority of the membership would still remain, for wise and harmonious government does not depend upon the vote of any individual or set of individuals, but upon the expression of the will of the whole people, and one hundred dollars is a price for suffrage that is practically prohibitive to the class of people that have been most instrumental in building Fairhope. I have an abiding faith in democracy, and Fairhope's troubles are but proof of Mr. George's assertion that, when land values are collected by a government that is not responsive to the will of the people, instead of the single tax, it is governmental landlordism.

Fels responded indignantly:

> Your memory is at fault. Your proof to my mind is no proof at all. Dr. Greeno is not a single-tax man, nor is he in favor of the colony policy. He has always openly and on all occasions opposed the plan. If he signed an application for membership on one of the required forms, and put his name to a declaration that he believed in the principles of Henry George, he openly stultified himself, when he talks, works, and feels just the opposite. . . . You yourself may be classed among those who were accepted, as for several years you preached in favor of the colony as loudly and as vigorously as any of its most ardent friends, though now you stand wholly on the opposite side. You were either in error then, or are so now.[16]

Next Fels attempted to interest Louis F. Post's single-tax journal, *The Public,* in Fairhope. He subscribed for 40 shares of the magazine's preferred stock at a price of $1,000, but Post's manager rebuffed him with the explanation "that to publish matter commending Fairhope leads to an insistent demand for the publication of matter attacking the colony, with the result of simply creating an arena of controversy on the matter to the advantage neither of the paper nor of Fairhope."

Replying at once upon his arrival in London, Fels disagreed:

> It seems to me that this is the very reason for publishing the facts about Fairhope from time to time. The whole thing must, sooner or later, be fought out publicly, if Fairhope is to amount to much as an object-lesson for the country. The main trouble is that a few soreheads in and near Fairhope, as well as further North, have tried to wreck an experiment they did not take the trouble to understand.

Then he wrote to editor Gaston about his own business and the *Fairhope Courier's*:

> Things in business hereabouts with me have been very slow, I must hustle 'em along now. I've been doing too much reform work of late to have any other result. I'm not kicking though and would do it again. . . . I *know* you know how to get up a paper. If it shows improvement in the near future, I'll be willing to subscribe for a considerable number of copies for mailing broadcast in the U. S. for propaganda work to increase circulation. Look over the whole sheet, and do what you can to better it. How do you get on financially?

Toward the end of May, with his next sailing for America imminent, he wrote: "Put Wm. MacQueen, State Prison, Trenton, N. J. on the mailing list for your newspaper. I'm trying to get this chap out of jail, and expect to send him back to his home in July. He's an Englishman, and has been most damnably treated." From Philadelphia on July 15, Fels told Gaston about a meeting with Judge Sulzberger and Dr. Solis-Cohen concerning the Jewish Territorial Organization, and requested that Sulzberger's name be added to the *Courier's* mailing list. Fels' idea for a Jewish Zion was, as he confided to Gaston,

> that if a country cannot be found then a large tract of land within another country can be got hold of and administered as Fairhope is being done. Say nothing of this in print please, as it's premature. . . . Herewith find $500 check for you to be used for paper privately, or for such things as you wish help in to make you easier and happier. I take it you wish to make the *Courier* a better paper, or to buy another press or some other like foolishness in which money may be used to advantage. I leave you untrammeled in the expenditure, but on

> condition that you use three lines of your letter only in thanking me, and that it's all between you and myself. I don't see how I can get down there this trip, but promise myself the pleasure next time I cross the pond. Am scrawling this with a pencil, as I've no stenographer at hand. Writing is a nuisance.[17]

His distaste for gratitude from his friends at Fairhope was genuine enough, though it was undoubtedly intensified by the controversy over Georgism, which frequently focused upon his largesse, as he was aware. "Please do not let any more things down there be called by my name," he once wrote Gaston. "It is the hardest thing in the world to make you people understand that I hate hero-worship! The latest thing I have heard is the Howland-Fels Library, and I am sick of this kind of monkey business!"

On a trip to Fairhope in 1907, Joe and Maurice Fels and Walter Coates interrupted their journey to inspect Booker T. Washington's industrial training school at Tuskeegee. Joe had been there nearly two years before, but it was a novel experience for the others. "This was an eye opener," Walter wrote, "and gives lots of ideas and food for thought."[18]

Fels was hoping to convert Tuskeegee Institute to the single-tax principles of Fairhope, and there was an inconclusive exchange between him and Washington. "I was born in Virginia, and raised in North Carolina," Fels introduced himself. "I think I understand the Negro question, and certainly appreciate its difficulties." He told Washington of Fairhope's example of community development as an economic solution to society's land question.

"You may be interested to know," Washington responded, "that there are a number of Negro towns

which are developing in a most helpful and satisfactory way." He told Fels about a community called Mound Bayou in the neighboring state of Mississippi, but Fels was more interested in Washington's plans for establishing Negro colonies in Alabama under Tuskeegee's auspices, some 20,000 acres of fertile cotton lands having been purchased for this purpose already.

"I notice that after three years the colonists will be allowed to purchase the land by installments," Fels observed, "but should not the community own the land in common, and, after paying for its original cost out of the rentals of the land, continue to collect the land-rentals increased as the population increases, and its value thereto? This surplus money to be expended in the making of roads and establishing of public utilities, which would otherwise be impossible?"[19]

There were no further exchanges between them.

Fels insisted upon restoring the service by boat between Fairhope and Mobile, and so the S. S. *Fairhope II* went into service. But the earlier boat, or the claims against her, continued to plague Fels. "I am coming again in December," he wrote Gaston in September 1907, upon disembarking in England, "and then hope to get to Fairhope, though I trust the old *Fairhope* boat builders won't catch me with their summons when I do come. You will remember they tried to do it when I was there before."

Debts remained from the first vessel, and newer aggravations arose from mismanagement of the second by Fels' representative, Powell. "I have known him some ten years in close association with public enterprises in Philadelphia, and private ones elsewhere," Fels wrote of his supervisor of vacant-lots cultivation. "I have not found him other than honest to the core;

and while he is occasionally a little hotheaded and apparently arbitrary, I must ascribe this to the heavy load of work he has had to carry for many years." Privately he revealed his fears to Gaston: "I am extremely sorry, and a good deal hurt, and not a little worried, at the attitude of some people down there towards Mr. Powell, and it is just possible that this attitude may not be without reason from the view of the people themselves." Nor was he reassured by letters from Gaston, Powell, and others. "I am not answering any of these in detail, as it will not do any good," he wrote on November 11 from London. "The only thing I can do at this great distance is to keep hoping that things will turn out alright. When I get down there again, I hope to be able to meet the whole community in conference, and perhaps some things may be cleared up and put in better shape thereby." And the boat debt continued to worry him: "As this is a rather serious matter, I should know the status of the whole thing before I make up my mind about visiting Fairhope again."[20]

When Fels next went to Fairhope, in February 1908, these issues were still up in the air. He confronted the colony's detractors and his personal opponents on their home grounds by speaking at Fairhope's church on George Washington's birthday. He began by commending Fairhope for its example that land alone afforded the solution for unemployment and social imbalance, and then described the situation in England, as he saw it, where only a minor fraction of the land was gainfully used, and where great estates provided nothing but hunting and recreation for the wealthiest classes, while masses of people crowded together in urban slums. He opposed a set of resolutions a minority of Fairhopers were proposing to support public works for the unemployed across the nation at large. He was

opposed to charity in principle, he said, and to public-works projects as unworkable. Such schemes confused the machines and mills, which were the products of labor, with the land, which was the gift of God. The employment of labor upon public works could only relieve a fraction of the distress temporarily, while landlords would increase their rents to absorb all the benefits, leaving the people with increased public debts and worse off than before. You have only to recognize the truth of Fairhope, he emphasized, where the problem of unemployment is practically unknown.

"Fairhope was founded upon the proposition that all the land value belongs to the people, and all is taken for them," he reflected after this visit.

> There is no piecemeal or partial work about it. I do not see how any believer in the justice or sufficiency of this policy can doubt that it must bring good results, however accomplished. Certainly the land reformers of Fairhope have shown no doubt of the results which must follow, and one has only to visit the community to see that their faith is being vindicated.[21]

During April and May 1908, the Town of Fairhope became an incorporated municipality under Alabama law, climaxing a succession of tumultuous citizens' meetings. The problem of insufficient democracy was resolved by this step, but the unique features of Fairhope as an experimental single-tax colony began immediately to diminish. A number of socialists won offices in the first municipal election, May 30, as the champions of popular democracy and public works, and H. S. Greeno, the man whom Fels had castigated two years earlier for not being a single-tax man, was elected mayor.

After congratulating Greeno, Fels wrote: "I am aware that you have not been in complete accord with the principles upon which Fairhope has been established, and while I have never had the opportunity of a quiet talk with you on the subject I have no doubt that you have been convinced of the worth to the country and the world of the social experiment going on there, and, will throw your influence in the direction of the right." He conceded that the community's success would have been greater if Baldwin County as a whole, instead of Fairhope alone, were under the same system, and added:

> I trust you will appreciate my years-long interest in Fairhope, though I have labored under the disadvantage of having so many think I am in it for the purpose of ultimately swallowing up the enterprise as a business speculation. Those who know me best, however, think differently, and I hope you are one of these. I am frank to say that having a prosperous business, and making money out of it, I am not tempted to outside speculation to pile up more, as I cannot take it with me when I turn my toes up to the daisies! Nor have I any other use for the major part of my earnings than to spend them to the best advantage of the common people.

Dr. Greeno's reply was not warm: "I have not been and am not now in sympathy with what is known here as the 'Fairhope Plan.' I have not been convinced of the worth to the country and the world of the social experiments as you claim are now being tried at Fairhope. . . . A little, small community comprising less than twenty-five single-taxers [among a total population of less than four hundred] trying to work up a scheme based upon their idea is foolishness and nonsense." Greeno continued that he was very much embarrassed

by the conduct of Robert F. Powell, "who is supposed by everyone to be your representative here, and who has scarcely a friend in the community."

Powell's mismanagement was scandalous, Greeno charged. The new steamer *Fairhope II*, the wharf, and a barge were losing money and fertilizer failed to arrive from Mobile as promised. Said Greeno:

> All seem to be of the opinion that he is unreliable, untruthful, and really dishonest, and why you should insist upon keeping that man as your representative is a mystery. . . . I have always believed that you have been honest in what you have done for Fairhope, but I am thoroughly of the opinion that you are laboring under delusions, which, if you would take the time and pains to investigate and get right down to facts, you would see the impracticability of the whole scheme.

Fels sought to mollify the new mayor: "I have always maintained that the Fairhope Plan is a practical one. . . . Until we could put the experiment into operation, it was best for the [Fairhope Single Tax] Corporation to hold title to the land, as the county, or the state, or the country are not prepared to take the thing over and enlarge it," he explained. "It may have been, as you say, foolhardy for a few single-taxers to work up such a scheme, but it has not been nonsense, as the working community, however small, has been an object lesson to the country for a good many years."

Dr. Greeno's charges against Powell rankled Fels:

> In what way do you consider him dishonest? Has he ever swindled you or anybody else that you know of in any business transaction? Do you know of anyone whom he has stolen from, or is there anybody there whom he has robbed? . . . Thank you for your good opinion

> of my honesty, but *Webster* gives various meanings to "delusions"—such as fraud, falsehood, treachery, etc. Do you mean any of these; if not, what do you mean? Is it your delivered opinion that I, a business man, who have lived nearly 3-score years, and is today the head of one of the largest firms of manufacturers in his line in the world, have been hoodwinked over a term of some 10 years by a few men, who are lovers of their kind, into spending money to help them carry out what they, and I, consider a most valuable social experiment?

If he was laboring under delusions, as Dr. Greeno complained, then Fels argued that Greeno would have to consider Theodore Roosevelt, William Jennings Bryan, and Count Tolstoy, "all the more eminent than either you or I, Dr. Greeno," as deluded also. "May the outcome be for the good of the people!" Fels expostulated.[22]

Next Fels wrote Gaston, asking him if he did not think it would be a good idea to correspond with leading single-taxers Bolton Hall and Daniel Kiefer on how best to deal with the town authorities of Fairhope. "In the multitude of counsellors, there may be safety," he suggested to the *Courier's* editor. In September he wrote Gaston: "I think you are right in not opposing Greeno at the coming election; he had best have his fling to the end."

Greeno and his socialistic colleagues on the town council were enjoying more than a "fling" however. They were altering the basis of Fairhope itself. They levied an annual tax of four dollars upon each male inhabitant between the ages of eighteen and forty-five, heresy from the standpoint of single-tax doctrine. The mayor's moves toward control over the real estate of the single-tax corporation was treason and revolution combined, even though the titles of ownership afforded

legal protection against any arbitrary actions. Fels wrote to Gaston:

> What occurs to me now is on the subject of the Corporation transferring any of the franchises to the Town organization without the greatest possible protection, and always with a string tied to it, so that these franchises can be withdrawn if *every* condition is not carried out to the benefit of the *entire* community. You have got too far along now to make mistakes, and even a small one might be fatal as it would establish a precedent.

To make matters worse, the boat-debt suit pending against Fels refused to disappear. "If I win it, there will be a certain amount of onus attached to the whole wretched business," Fels conceded, "and tho' I don't rightly owe a penny, I feel that somebody owes it, and that the Boat Building Co. are right in trying to make somebody pay it." He instructed Gaston to lay out a plan to approach the other side discreetly, "Fels owes nothing, and will likely be able to prove it, though there will necessarily be considerable law expenses," he told the editor to begin:

> Rather than have him sued, however, for a debt he had nothing to do with contracting, and as Gaston and the other chaps, who were in charge of the old *Fairhope* at the time the repairs were made, feel a certain amount of responsibility, though not of a pecuniary character, they have got together, and decided to raise, say, $1000 among themselves and friends to pay the Boatbuilding Co. in full settlement. Between myself and my friends of course, I will pay the compromise through you, and which you must intimate to those you get together to help in this matter.

The dry-dock people and the boat repairers of the old S. S. *Fairhope* accepted the offer of $1,000 for settlement, and absorbed all court costs as well. Fels was elated. He instructed his brother Maurice to remit the money at once. Upon arriving from England two weeks before Christmas on the *Lusitania,* however, he learned from Powell that $1,500 of unsettled claims were still outstanding against the boat, but that these could be settled for approximately 20 per cent of face value. "Before I come down there, these claims must be settled," Fels wrote Gaston from Philadelphia, "and I am enclosing you my check for 20% ($300) of the $1500, and if it should cost a few dollars more you must draw on me for it, or write or telegraph me and I will send you a check. I must not be worried by any more threats of law suits, so you and Powell will have to hustle."

To Fairhoper Frank Brown Fels wrote: "It is too bad that everybody can't get together, and clean up their little squabbles once for all. From the amount of gossip, backbiting, and rows that go on, one would suppose that none of the population there had ever been in a town, but had always lived in back-woods, and copied the animals in fighting for whatever they want." To Gaston he snapped, "I am not so much interested in your New Year's celebration, as I am in helping to straighten you out."[23]

In an effort to save Fairhope for the single tax, Fels switched tactics now. On Fairhope's fourteenth anniversary, which was celebrated in Fels' presence at a banquet on New Year's night, 1909, his friend Dan Kiefer of Cincinnati came forward after the speechmaking to announce that Mr. Fels had just given the sum of $5,000 to the Fairhope School of Organic Education for its building and equipment, with a pledge of $1,000 annually in addition for the next five years for maintenance.

The School of Organic Education—a school dedicated to the *whole needs* of children as *individuals*—was the achievement of Marietta Johnson. Started by her at the invitation of some of the colonists, the school was already on its road to that nationwide renown which would arouse the admiration of many progressive educators, including John Dewey. Mrs. Johnson's pedagogical philosophy flourished among people who enjoyed social innovations, and a number of new inhabitants were attracted by her approach, writer Upton Sinclair among them, although only a minority became involved in the dissensions they encountered there.

Fels' purpose was to demonstrate his support for Fairhope in the face of adversity, but Gaston pointed out the implications of his gesture. "The benefits of this school should only be extended to those who reside upon colony land," he wrote in opposition to Mrs. Johnson's intention to reform education by inviting all comers, neighbors as well as settlers. The benefits of Fairhope ought to be confined to lands owned and administered by the colony, Gaston argued in a long letter to Fels only three days after the banquet, a message which greeted Fels in Philadelphia after "a bully two days" spent in Cleveland with ex-Mayor Tom L. Johnson. The colony existed to collect land values for all to enjoy, Gaston asserted. "But those who prefer to live off the colony land have no right to ask that the benefits of its policies shall be extended to them. In other words, they ought not to expect to reap the benefits of private ownership and public ownership at the same time."

Fels agreed, and wrote Mrs. Johnson:

> The more I think of the matter, the more certain do I become that the benefits of the Organic School should go to people living on colony land. Indeed, so certain

am I now about this that, had I considered it well, I should have made my contributions from the beginning conditional on this being done. It is against my usual style to have a string tied to a gift! . . . I know your great good will to all people, and I know you lean towards what you believe to be the right kind of socialism. For myself I believe in most of the things you do, though . . . if our work is to be of any constructive use, it will have to more and more draw the line between public and private ownership.[24]

The wrong kind of socialism persisted at Fairhope, as he saw it, and so did the internecine squabbles which inevitably involved him. "I am extremely sorry if, as you say, my doing all this has turned out to be a very grave hardship to the town," Fels replied to Mayor Greeno, who was criticizing his sponsorship of the Organic School. "I fail to see where that comes in, and beg that you will enlighten me." Fels said that he had never believed in the necessity for a municipality such as Greeno formed there, and he was resisting the new taxes the town authorities intended to invoke. "I am opposed to all these kind of taxes," Fels told his foe, "as every true land reformer is."

"I am losing my few remaining hairs on account of the infernal squabbles constantly being got into by Powell and other folk there," he complained to Gaston in April. Then, in May, in response to a financial statement which was sent him from Fairhope, Fels exploded: "I am ashamed of the whole damned thing, and everybody that had anything to do with it," he told Gaston. "I am too infernally mad to say more."

Joseph Fels was plunging into the biggest reform ventures of his life, both in England and the United States, and Fairhope was becoming more of a nuisance than an asset. He was throwing himself into the agi-

tation to win passage of Lloyd George's revolutionary measures for land taxation. "I've been so crazy busy over this Budget Bill for taxation of land values that about everything else was knocked out of my head," he wrote Gaston on May 28. "If the Lords don't throw out the whole of the Budget Bill (which would mean something pretty serious), I've done the big thing of my life so far."

He rebuffed a prospective colonist who solicited him for financial assistance to construct a hotel for Fairhope, an enterprise he had once encouraged. "Within the last six months . . . ," he wrote to John W. Ettel, "I have pledged large sums of money toward the promotion of the single tax in the U.S., Great Britain, Canada, and several other countries, provided the inhabitants of such countries raise equal amounts. This will probably run to $250,000 before all the pledges are in, and I feel I must stop and breathe for the time being before going further."

"Good luck to you and yours," he saluted Gaston at the end of 1909, and the distance widened between them.[25]