

PREFACE

Regrettable delay has occurred in connection with the publication of this work. It was all but ready for the printer, when, towards the close of the year 1908, its author was called away by important interests to China, Japan and Siberia. A few months later came the sorrowful news of his death, in far off Vladivostock, and to others fell the task of seeing the book through the press.

At a meeting of friends of Max Hirsch, held shortly after his death, it was decided to call for subscriptions towards meeting the cost of publishing this volume, and of another containing some of the best examples of his work, and also to establish a fund which should furnish annually a prize to be awarded to the best essay (open to University undergraduates and students of Workingmen's and Technological schools throughout the Commonwealth) on one or other phase of the great economic principles with which Max Hirsch was identified, and to the advancement of which he so unselfishly devoted his brilliant intellectual powers and marvellous energy. This call was responded to, in large amounts and small, from all parts of Australia, with the result that the proposals outlined above are about to be consummated.

The volume here presented is the outcome of much laborious research, and forms an admirable summary of the attempts made throughout the world to deal with the problem that, everywhere, is imperatively pressing for solution, viz., How best to conserve the inherent rights of the community as well as of the individual in relation to the land and improvements thereon. It is a garnerage of reliable information, which should prove of invaluable assistance to all practical exponents, as well as students, of the subject of land values taxation. Like everything Max Hirsch did, the work shows a thorough grasp of every detail, and an earnest desire to place all the facts faithfully and fully before his readers.

Since the manuscript was penned further important developments have occurred with respect to land values taxation in various parts of the world, most notably in Great Britain. The passing of the British Budget or Finance Bill for 1909-10, with its land valuation and land taxation clauses, constitutes the greatest triumph yet achieved for the principle in the political arena. During the months preceding the introduction of the Budget, by-election after by-election went

against the Government, and public opinion in England anticipated the early fall of the Asquith Ministry, and the return to power of the Conservative party. But Lloyd George's masterpiece of statesmanship changed all this. The eternal principle of justice underlying the measure appealed powerfully to the liberal spirit that still dominates the land of Cobden and Bright. The erst-while dormant supporters of Liberalism were at once galvanized to vigorous action, with the result that, despite the united opposition of the forces of monopoly and privilege, despite a bitterly hostile plural vote, despite a restricted franchise, the Liberal party was still the dominant party at the close of the recent general election, which was forced upon the country by reactionaries in the forlorn hope of snatching a victory amid confused issues.

In the newly constituted House of Commons the Budget was re-submitted, and once more carried by a substantial majority, and in the House of Lords, where formerly it was rejected by 350 to 75, it was passed without even a division. It received the Royal assent on April 29th, 1910, a year to the day from its first reading, and in accordance with the terms of the Act a valuation of all land in the United Kingdom was immediately commenced by Commissioners.

That the Chancellor of the British Exchequer approached the question of land values taxation from the standpoint of Henry George and Max Hirsch there is no doubt. For instance, in his speech on introducing the Budget, he said: "The growth in the value, more especially of urban sites, is due to no expenditure of capital or thought on the part of the ground owner, but entirely owing to the energy and the enterprise of the community. Where it is not due to that cause, and where it is due to any expenditure by the urban owner himself, full credit ought to be given to him in taxation . . . . It is undoubtedly one of the worst evils of our present system of land tenure, that instead of reaping the benefit of the common endeavor of its citizens, a community has always to pay a heavy penalty to its ground landlords for putting up the value of their land."

In Victoria, which fiscally is the most laggard State in the Commonwealth, there has also been a decided move forward. The Land Values Tax Bill, which was so ably piloted through the Victorian Assembly last session by the State Treasurer, the Hon. W. A. Watt, was an earnest endeavour to give Legislative expression to the People's will. This has since been made so clearly manifest that the passage of the measure

through both Houses, with possibly some modification of its disfiguring exemption and graduation clauses, may be regarded as one of the certainties of next session.

Regarding Australia as a whole, the strong feeling that prevails in all the States in favour of community given values being taken for the community's needs is indicated by the successes scored at the recent general elections by the Labour party, with a Federal land tax in the forefront of its programme. While exception can be taken to the departure from sound economic doctrine involved in the exemptions and graduations, which the Bill to be introduced by the Federal Government early in the ensuing session will contain, it is a source of gratification to the advocates of land values taxation that a measure even partially embodying the principle is about to be enacted for the Commonwealth.

To Max Hirsch more than to any other one person is due the present enlightened state of Australian public opinion on the Land question. Apart from his great personal endeavours, in speech and by pen, in the cause of social equity, his noble example has stimulated hundreds of other men to action on the same altruistic lines--and these men, inspired by his memory, and by the love of humanity which he inculcated, will persevere in the fight against monopoly and unjust privilege which he waged with such strength and fearlessness.

The words of the well-known American poetess, Mrs. Frances Margaret Milne, written on the death of Henry George, may be applied also, in fullest meaning, to his true disciple, Max Hirsch: --

Hast thou a requiem strain,  
Glad, free and strong?  
Meet for the glorious life,  
Sorrow would wrong.  
Tears for the vanquished, the weak  
Crushed in the fray:  
This is a conqueror's soul  
Passing to-day.

Melbourne, June 1910.

A. V.