

LETTER: A PLEA FOR EFFECTIVE ACTION

MANY groups of people are working to establish a system of land tenure that would use the rent of land as revenue in place of taxes. In 1879 Henry George published an excellent, detailed, explanation entitled *Progress and Poverty* in which he explains the justice and advantages of collecting land rent as revenue.

Yet here we are, over a century later, without a sign that such an economy will be established. The one, notable and splendid attempt was made in Denmark. The Justice Party (Georgist) helped to form a coalition Government which proved, over a period of three and a half years (1957 to 1960), that although only approximately 3% of the full value of the land rent was collected, the following outstanding results were obtained.

On Oct. 2, 1960, the *New York Times* wrote: "Big lesson from a small nation. Professor Commager recommended that other nations might learn from Denmark's example. During that short period of three and a half years the following improvements in the economy occurred:-

1. The deficit on the balance of payments turned into a surplus.
2. Denmark's total debts abroad reduced to a quarter.
3. National rate of interest went down
4. Unemployment soon replaced by almost full employment.
5. Considerable increase in production and wages.
6. Inflation brought to a standstill (1%) yet jobs increased by 100,000.
7. All wage increases were real increases, highest ever in Denmark.
8. No new taxes during three and a half years.
9. Early in 1960 all import restrictions were lifted and duties cut.
10. Industrial peace — free of strikes.

This remarkable success was not the result of a world wide boom in trade because that did not happen

Before the 1960 general election,

however, the opposition started a blitz directed solely against the smallest party in the coalition — the Justice Party's nine men group — and used hitherto the largest sum ever in Danish election campaigns, financed by Conservatives and landowner associations. With its limited financial resources, and lacking support from the press, the Justice Party was unable to withstand the violent attack. The party lost half its votes and was unable to collect the minimum required for representation in parliament.

After that tragedy — what next?

Surely there is a lesson here for all Georgists in that tragic setback, when it is realised that even the work force in Denmark at that time, who had benefitted so much with practically no unemployment and a real increase in wages, could not see through the propaganda thrown at them?

Does it not point to the necessity for the electorate to have a sound practical understanding of the benefits and justice of the collection of land rent as revenue? Why should we not expect the same sort of thing to happen here if the electorate are not aware of what is going on? Unless people know and appreciate why the economy improves they will be just as susceptible to a no-expense-spared propaganda by the Conservatives and landowners as the Danes were.

In practical terms, it is necessary to take into account the strength of the opposition and the line of attack that will defeat them. Their strength lies in the possession of land, money and the belief that they are entitled to it. Under the law of the land, of course, they are. The strength of the Georgists is in the understanding that there is a better way, with justice for all, to run an economy. But that, obviously, is not enough to overthrow the established political parties. The one, practical advantage that can bring success is that there are more voters

who have little money and little or no land who, therefore, can see that they stand to gain from Georgist legislation. Also there is a section of society that are owner/occupiers who can, nevertheless, be expected to support such a just cause.

That is the strength the Georgists must use as the only way, without violence and in a democracy, to defeat the opposition decisively and permanently at the ballot box.

Is it not time for some effort and money to be directed at the people whose vote will decide the issue? Only through a Georgist constituency party, supporting candidates for council and government seats, can a firm base be established that will, by pamphlets, door to door canvassing and meetings, inform and educate a majority of the electorate so that they will not be duped by a powerful propaganda campaign.

Remember that persuasion by publishing many well written books has failed over the past century to establish a political party with even prospective members of parliament, and that is a long time — far too long.

A great deal of time, effort and money by many Georgists could be blown away in one general election, as happened in Denmark, unless enough voters have a clear understanding of the advantages and justice of collecting land rent as revenue. The term — land rent as revenue — rolls off the tongue quite easily. It is explanatory and could help in electioneering, perhaps.

The national body necessary to give publishing and printing support to constituency parties is already in place at the office of *Land and Liberty*. Their help would be of immense value in setting up a Georgist movement with a firm base. One hopes it may be forthcoming.

W.J. Barber,
Coleford,
Glos.,
England.