

Proposed International Conference

DENMARK, AUGUST 1926

WE are able to make the preliminary announcement that the Danish Joint Land Values Committee and the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values of London, have decided to cooperate in convening in Denmark

The Third International Conference to
promote the Taxation of Land Values and
Free Trade

the inclusive dates of the meetings to be within the last fortnight of the month of August next year (1926).

The two Committees accordingly issue, by this announcement, invitations to the Conference to all adherents of Henry George's teaching. As a guide to the nature, purpose and scope of the Conference, they direct attention to the Declaration of Principle and Policy adopted at the International Conference to Promote the Taxation of Land Values, held in Oxford, England, August, 1923; this Declaration to be taken as accompanying all intimations and invitations. The text of it will be reprinted later.

The following are some of the plans already arranged:—

The Conference will begin with a session of a couple of days in Copenhagen, and thereafter visit various towns and country districts and interesting institutions and establishments in Denmark, both on the Islands and on the mainland of Jutland;

It will continue its sessions during this tour by gathering in the evenings for Conference business at various stopping places en route;

It will visit some of the People's High Schools and Agricultural Colleges which are such a distinctive and important feature of Danish social life;

Special facilities will be given to study Danish agriculture and its methods, the Danish land system, cooperative dairies and other cooperative undertakings;

There will be excursions to some of the formerly entailed estates out of which peasant small-holdings have been created, with tenure on the principle of private ownership of all improvements, subject to payment to the community of rent for the land determined by the periodically assessed value of the land apart from improvements;

The Conference will return to Copenhagen and conclude with a meeting or a day's session there.

A Conference so arranged, combined with a tour of this kind, will not only give new strength and inspiration to the movement in the International sense, but will be of particular advantage to our progressive forces in Denmark by bringing into intimate association with the work and meetings of the Conference a number of the active centres in the provincial towns and in the counties and parishes, as well as in the Metropolis.

Notice of intention to take personal part in the Conference should be sent to the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values, 11, Tothill Street, London, S. W. 1, where the correspondent resides in any country other than Denmark, Norway or Sweden; and from these latter, notification should be sent to Messrs. F. Folke and Abel Brink, 15, Monradsvej, Copenhagen. For those who in any event are unable to travel to Denmark, the intention is to open a roll of honorary members, and it is hoped that many will associate themselves with the Conference in that way.

Announcement will be made later of other arrangements—membership fee, probable expense of travel, papers or addresses to be discussed, etc.

Meanwhile, the Danish Joint Committee and the United Committee ask that this announcement be reprinted by all journals, in every country, devoted to the Taxation of Land Values and International Free Trade so that intimation may be given to their readers and invitation conveyed to all with whom they are in touch.

Taxes and Land Gambling

HERE is another millstone about Cleveland's neck. Everybody knows it is there. Everybody knows who put it there. Everybody knows all about it. One of the things that everybody knows about the exorbitant taxes in Cleveland is that nothing will ever be done artificially to correct them. Nothing but the operation of natural laws can avail. Protests of business men, victims, will be fruitless, we fear.

We have very great respect for the county auditor, Mr. Zangerle. He is a competent and capable man. But Mr. Zangerle knows and we should know, that evading taxes or juggling valuations is not at all the right way, or any way, to lighten the tax burden. The only way to do that is to get at their cause. The speculation fever must be reduced. We suspect in Mr. Zangerle not only the cold efficiency of a scrupulous tax agent, but a warmer desire on his part to help us by showing us vividly the costliness of the fundamental mistakes we make.

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Cleveland has been indulging in an orgy of land speculation for years. Land has been put on the basis of suspenders, shoe strings, coffee grinders, toy balloons and every other sort of merchandise. The usefulness of land has been made secondary to its gambling possibilities. The result is that paper profits have been pyramided into a set of land values that the land itself does not justify. The test of land values is the amount that land will legitimately earn by use, not what it may be unloaded for on to the next fellow. We have done business on a radically different and radically wrong understanding of that important fact. There can not be, to illustrate, one way of calculating valuations for rent-fixing purposes and another for tax-paying purposes, on the same land.

All this sounds much like Henry George, to be sure. But, regardless of the mechanics of a single tax on land, and of the practical, operative merits of such a system, the fact remains that land abuses are many, vital and disastrous, and that they work out into taxes in the long run.

It is an abuse of land to gamble in it and that is exactly what many men have been doing with Cleveland land, mostly, of course, business, or potentially business property. They themselves are responsible for much of the fictitiousness which now enters into the paper valuations of land. But how can a county auditor who is honest do otherwise than tax land on a basis of its owners' valuation of it? On the basis, admittedly exorbitant, of its rentals?

There can not be two systems of land valuation, one based on fact and the other on the logical but unfortunate consequences of land gambling. To tax land at a fraction, any fraction from one to ninety-nine per cent. of its face value, is very obviously to beg the question. Cincinnati does that and is in a far worse hole than Cleveland. That is just plain cheating. In addition, it does no good. It all comes out in the tax rate. The only apparent way out of the predicament that certain Cleveland land is in, is for the county auditor to allow one system of valuation for the purpose of land speculation, and keep another and confidential one for taxation purposes.

This latter, obviously, would be downright dishonest and would be to encourage the very vice of land gambling that is to blame for the whole trouble. He can not say: "Here, you go ahead and hook the next fellow at a price to include what you paid and a fair profit for yourself, and I will tax the land at what it is really worth but tell nobody what it is." That would not do. Mr. Zangerle has no alternative to his present method. But, as we said before, we suspect that he wisely knows that the effect of his policy will ultimately be to check land gambling in "fancy corners" and so forth, and stabilize land values and land dreaming.

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The unfortunate part of it all is that a small number of men are responsible for an evil under which we all must groan, most of us entirely innocent of land gambling and properly to be classed as land users rather than land speculators. The last party to hold a piece of property that has been traded back and forth until its see-saw is stopped either by Mr. Zangerle's taxes or by the natural consequence of its breaking down in the speculation process, is the victim. There is no way of telling whether he too, was struck by accident, or was himself in the game of playing horse with land and just happened to be the last man out. A great many innocent people are going to find themselves with land, apartment houses and various segments of the interminable strings of stores now lining Cleveland streets, which moved as far as their possession and then couldn't move any farther. We feel sorry for them.

We feel sorrier for the great multitudes who have had rents and home buying costs raised beyond reason through the land speculation fever, for marked disturbances in values run through a whole city like an earthquake. But so long as land is bought and sold every few hours for the sake of a profit, and its value soars with every "deal," rents and prices must soar in accurate relation to each step. This unfair process affects all land values. Rent is based on these values, and so the vicious circle runs.

For all values related to land to fluctuate, and only taxes be excepted would be like making water run up hill—it can't be done. It has been great sport to hammer up values for speculation purposes. Paying the fiddler down at the court house is another story. There are many other parts to the story, and all equally sad. The only remedy is to stop the gambling in business property. A difficult process, for you can't prove who are the guilty few and who the innocent majority. In the meantime Cleveland must suffer and Mr. Zangerle seems bound to make its sufferings acute enough to precipitate thought of a cure.

—Cleveland Topics, Aug. 15.

Cleveland Topics is a society Journal which has been published for seventy years. Its editor Charles T. Henderson, is an old newspaper man and a vigorous writer, and *Cleveland Topics* is an extremely handsome weekly devoted to social matters of the "Upper Ten," the doings of the country clubs, golf clubs, polo, etc. We felicitate Mr. Henderson on the ability to see and the courage to attack an evil institution. —Editor LAND AND FREEDOM.

Anna George de Mille Returns to America

IN the July-August issue of LAND AND FREEDOM, our correspondent, Chester C. Platt, gave an interesting account of the dinner tendered to the daughter of Henry George, Mrs. Anna George de Mille, in London. Mrs. de Mille in this issue (see Correspondence) favors us with her personal impression of the many she met in her trip abroad. We know our readers will read with interest the breezy communication in which she recounts her experience.

Sir Oliver Lodge on The Land Question

TO me it is somewhat surprising that it is quite legal and ordinary for a person to be able to sell a portion of England for his own behoof. It does not seem to be reasonable, in any high sense, that a bit of the country itself should belong absolutely to some individual, so that he has the right to cut down trees on it, to dig up the minerals in it, to sell either it or its coal, to lay it waste and desolate as a deer forest, or a cinder-heap, if it so pleases him, and to levy a heavy tax on building enterprise; to do in fact, what he likes with his own, and live elsewhere on the proceeds in idleness and luxury.

—SIR OLIVER LODGE.