

HISTORY OF THE GEORGEIST MOVEMENT IN HOLLAND.

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As early as 1890 there was a "Nederlandse Bond voor Landnationalisatie" (Dutch League for Land Nationalisation) (1), with a paper called "Grond voor Allen" (Land for All), edited by Jan Stoffel. The burden of his message was: "The earth is given to all men as home and workplace; they have to it an equal right". This league was dissolved in 1897.

A similar effort by A. Rauwerda, in co-operation with his Georgeist printer Joh. Kuiken and his friend Jan Stoffel, lasted from 1894 to 1896. Rauwerda's publication "Grond en Arbeid" (Land and Labor) dealt with daily practical problems in contrast with Stoffel's "Land for All" which was more philosophical or theoretical in style.

After that, there was a gap in their history until 1921, when a "Bond tot hervorming van de Grondeigendom" (League for the Reform of Land Ownership) was founded, with a monthly called "De Nieuwe Aarde" (The New Earth). It lasted 14 years and amalgamated in 1935 with a weekly called "Recht en Vrijheid" (Justice and Freedom), published by a political party of the same name, led by Harm Kolthek. "Recht en Vrijheid" was first published in 1932 and in 1938 it changed its name to "Ons Erfdeel" (Our Heritage). It disappeared during the war. The 'Justice and Freedom' party got one seat on the Groningen municipal council in 1931 and five seats in 1935. This advance was not maintained; Kolthek died in 1946 and in the election in 1949 the party got only one seat.

It is confusing that during this period (1936 - 1940) there was a monthly journal also called "Ons Erfdeel" published by the "Nederlands Verbond tot Afschaffing van Private Grondeigendom" NVAPG (Dutch League for the abolition of private ownership of Land) which was founded by Jan Willems who was introduced to George's ideas by Graham Peace (2), who saw the big Dutchman listening intently at the back of the crowd at one of his open-air meetings in London. Willems later went to see him for a fuller discussion. Willems went home and started his own movement, modelling "Ons Erfdeel" on Peace's paper The Commonwealth.

Willems fell a victim to the Nazis during the war and, when the war was over, his leading associates joined with the survivors of the Justice and Freedom group in

(1) The term "nationalisation" in the name of the league refers to the Georgeist idea of the collection of the rent of land for public purposes, not to the socialist plan for control and management of land use by the State.

(2) Graham Peace was the leader of the British Commonwealth Land Party, a political party that called for the immediate collection of all land rent, without compensation and the abolition of all taxes.

founding the "Vereniging voor Recht en Vrijheid" (Union for Justice and Freedom), with Arjen Sevenster as chairman. This organisation revived "Ons Erfdeel" as a 16-page monthly. The decision to form a union and not a political party was deliberate. It thought it best not to separate itself from the established political parties by forming a new party, but try to influence all of them to adopt its ideas.

The new Union was very small, with barely a hundred members, and for some years was able to report little progress. In 1971, however, a professional publicist, Cees Griffioen, was caught by the Georgeist idea and contributed his professional skills to spreading it. He proposed that the Union should establish a Foundation with a small staff as the vehicle for propaganda. This consisted of Cees Griffioen, as publicist and printer, Wim Costerus as chairman, Siebe Sevenster as secretary, Daan Reiche as treasurer, (died december last year), Jan J. Pot as so-called scientific assistant and Wim Born as active member. This group currently meets every two or three weeks.

After exhaustive discussion it was decided not to chose an existing word as the name of the Foundation because, time and again, it had turned out that almost every available word had several different interpretations. We therefore chose the made-up name Grondvest. It was formed by analogy with 'handvest' (charter), as in the Charter of the United Nations. The sense of 'Grondvest', therefore, is 'the charter of the land' or perhaps, to give it a freer translation which would convey more of the radical political flavour of the original, "The Land Chartist". If this was adopted, the organization, the "Stichting Grondvest" could be called the Land Chartist Foundation.

This name 'Grondvest' also serves as the name of the journal, now published quarterly. The first issue of 'Grondvest' was published in 1973 and consisted of four A3-size pages. The headlines were: "All Taxes can be Abolished" and "The Authorities Can get their Money From Our Land" The first paragraph under this heading will be enough to show that Grondvest is passing on the original Georgeist message much as George himself would have proclaimed it. It reads as follows:

"All men have to live and work on land, and to live from it. Not farmers only, town-dwellers too! All members of the human community have an equal right to their share of the earth. Is this right recognised? Is it applied? No. The best and richest portions of the earth have long been declared to be private property and laws have been made to protect this property. The laws are unjust since they are in conflict with the rights and interests of the human community in that they undeservedly favour a small number of people but seriously disadvantage the majority. Pure gifts of nature - light, air, water and land - are in principle at the free disposal of the community".

The tone of George's message in Progress and Poverty also appears in the following statement which is printed in a framed panel, also on the front page of the same issue:

"Grondvest turns against the existing economic system, not against people. When we speak critically of private property in land, our criticism applies exclusively to the system that this form of property makes possible and maintains. Indeed the great majority of individual landowners derive small advantages from the existing system. In fact, they too are victims of private property in land".