

SPAIN

The doctrine that the earth is by natural law common property has had in Spain a long and distinguished pedigree. The regime of common property in land was the one which prevailed before the Roman domination; it was the latter which brought about a change of view upon the subject, and included land in the category of private property.

But all along voices have been raised in insistence upon justice, and though of some authors no record has survived, or none but such as it would now be difficult to search out, there remain excellent traces of those who, during a period which began with the Sixteenth century have, in unbroken succession, voiced the demand for the restoration to the people of their common inheritance.

Juan Luis Vives in 1526; Father Mariana, of the Society of Jesus, in 1599; Pedro de Valencia in 1600; Caxa de Leruela in 1631; Florridablanca in 1770; Campomanes in 1771; Martinez Marina in 1820, and Alvaro Flores Estrada in 1839, proclaimed this truth in their numerous works and formed the Spanish economic school whose tendency was to subordinate private land-ownership to the general welfare and enable all men to utilize the land.

The following four forms of policy are those in which this tendency of this Spanish economic school has been manifested: (1) The common use of pastures by the entire vicinage, and periodical allotment of agricultural land; (2) The establishment of permanent "fee" holdings for cultivators, granted by the State on a fixed rent; (3) The recognition of the private ownership of land, but subject to the obligation of the owner to let the land on permanent leases on a rent ("tenant right"); (4) The nationalization of the land, compensation being made to the owners.

Thus, then, it appears that the Spanish economists, while in some degree realizing the cause of our social ills, did not discover

the true remedy. They considered the land exclusively with reference to its relation to agriculture, which in their time was the predominant form of productive industry. No one of them considered it in its true economic character, namely, the aggregate of natural elements constituting the planet on which we live.

Nevertheless, the manifestation of such tendencies by the school in question gave promise that, if further developed and realized, they would have arrived at the true doctrines of economic justice. But in the actual event they sank into oblivion when tyranny succeeded liberty.

Under Feudalism almost all the land of Spain had become private property; most of it belonged to "communities," churches and monasteries; the rest was in the hands of the nobles and "gentlemen of lineage." That is to say, the owners of the land were the titled gentry, counts, dukes, and marquesses, and the Church and the religious fraternities.

By four laws enacted in 1811, 1813, 1823, and 1837, the nation acquired the jurisdictional and feudal powers of the former lords, together with the privileges and incidents, personal or real, connected therewith; but that other right of the landlords, the right to collect rent, was not taken from them. Hence it is that the people of entire towns continue paying to-day to the Duke of Medinaceli, the Marquess of Alcañices, and other aristocrats, a sort of ground rent for their holdings, exactly as such rents were formerly paid to the ancestors of these beneficiaries; exactly, in other words, as though we were still living in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This goes on, in spite of the revolutions we have had!

Since the time mentioned, the land question seems to have been but little considered by anyone. When from time to time the crises have brought great suffering, a clamor has been raised, but no remedy has been suggested other than that "production be increased" (!), until very recently, through the progress of the George movement throughout the world, and the agitation promoted by the Single Tax League, the conspiracy of silence has broken down in Spain, with the result that today the taxation of

land values is one of the policies of the Liberal party, the leader of which, the Count of Romanones, in a recent speech, declared himself as follows:

“Taxation reform has become necessary in order to secure our financial and economic independence by affording to the provinces and municipalities revenues of their own to provide for their local needs. The economic and administrative programmes now being undertaken impose upon Governments very costly tasks; consequently, the time has come to concentrate all the attention, all the activity, and all the energy of the Parliament and the National Executive upon these fundamental reforms, which are more necessary, more beneficial, more indispensable for the welfare of the country, than the endless and futile discussions upon those so-called political subjects, raising questions of merely partisan doctrine, which excite passion and waste valuable time. To-day the democratic aspirations of the country reach much farther, political transformations occur with a rapidity which leaves us dazed; that which yesterday was deemed an ultimate aim, for the attainment of which no sacrifice should be withheld, to-day hardly interests us. A change is taking place in our politics, which is like that which is taking place in literature: The works which made our grandparents weep, and wrung their very heart-strings, we listen to with icy indifference; they seem to us so childish as to be ridiculous. The great political ideals for which our ancestors shed their blood, do not seem to us to be important enough to justify any anxiety or eagerness to obtain them. The liberalism of our day must fight its battle in a different field, and that battle must be a harder and more decisive one. We of today must attack with all our energy the great problems of tax reform, of labor-law reform, and who knows whether we may not have to deal with those fundamental laws upon which rights which we deemed sacred have heretofore been based. It is high time that governments, regardful of the wishes and aspirations of the nation, advised and incited by its social organs, by its co-operating interests, by the spokesmen of Parliament, of property, of industry, of commerce, of navigation, of whatever elements are constituents of the national interest, shall develop with vigor, with expedition, with energy, whatever policies may be necessary to the securing of our financial and economic independence. This is what the Liberal party proposes to do, and these brief sentences embody an outline of what may constitute its economic and administrative programme.”

Don Melquiades Alvarez, leader of the Reform party, in a speech at Granada said, among other things:

“Furthermore, we distinguish between taxes upon wealth created by labor, and taxes upon wealth which is not produced by labor. The former, relatively light, the latter, relatively heavy, because wealth is a collective social product and in part belongs to the community; so that by taxation society but recovers something it has itself developed and produced. Again, we distinguish between wealth which is productive and wealth which is unproductive. This is what Lloyd George did in England. There are men who have immense parks used only for hunting, for fishing, for pleasure; which are wholly unproductive. In Spain there are men who own large estates (*latifundios*) which produce nothing, which are wholly unutilized. On the other hand, there are people who invest their money in wealth which is productive, wealth-creating; who develop the industry and commerce of the country. These we must tax less; the former more. Why? Because that is the just thing to do, and, besides, by doing this we make productive wealth which would else be unproductive.”

The Liberal party is at present in power, and it may be hoped that it will carry out in practice the policy proclaimed by its leader, by again introducing in Parliament a Bill presented by it when it was last in office, by which the basis of the land tax was changed so as to make the land values, as distinguished from improvements, the subject of assessment.

The President of the Supreme Tribunal, in a solemn assembly for the ceremonial opening of the courts, made an address in which he demonstrated the urgent need in our jurisprudence, of revising the concept of property in land. Similar ideas were urged in a speech made during the present year by a Minister in the Conservative cabinet which has recently retired.

The foregoing details give some idea of the way in which the George reform is making its way in Spain; a result contributed to by the work of the “Liga Española para el Impuesto Unico” (the Spanish League for the Single Tax), which has been working with ever increasing efficiency since 1911. It has caused to be put in actual circulation 3,000 copies of the excellent Spanish translation of *Progress and Poverty*, which had lain forgotten in Barcelona since 1892.—A. A.