

SWITZERLAND

Not until the publication of *Progress and Poverty* by Henry George was there any thought given in Switzerland to the connection between access to the land and the living conditions of the lower classes of the nation. The theory that wherever access to the land is withheld from use, there poverty increases as industry progresses—this theory was accepted by the first Swiss organization, "Freiland" (Free Land), which was formed in 1889.

At first it proceeded to objects which required immediate consideration. It submitted in 1890 to the federal council a petition for the monopolizing of the water power. The federal council received the petition in a friendly spirit, but it was not granted and that only in a measure, until 18 years later, when in 1908, the right to the Swiss water power was transferred to the council.

On account of the hostile attitude assumed by those who were of consequence in economic affairs and the indifference of the public, the Swiss organization "Freiland" was disbanded, about the middle of the 90's of the last century.

The appearance in the winter of 1910 of my novel, *Heaven on Earth*, and the delivering of several lectures by me at the instigation of Joseph Fels in Thun and Bern, gave an impetus to a revival of the Bodenreform organization, at first in Canton Bern, with which the old guard of "Freiland" of Bern—or what was left of it—became affiliated. The Bern organization expanded in 1914 to a Swiss Society for Land Reform. As such it made its first public appearance in 1915 in that it proposed to the federal council the buying up of the debt-burdened landed estates by a loan fund.

This suggestion was not accepted by the council because, according to its opinion, it would have opened the way to a paper-currency regime. So the society, as such, let the matter

drop. Some individual members, however, were not satisfied with the reply of the council, and having in the meantime accepted the teaching of the economist Silvio Gesell, who at the time had settled in Canton Neuenburg, they came to the conclusion that paper money, especially such as in the course of time lost in value to a great degree, was in fact the only means of exchange which could prevent a crisis. Therefore, the Society for Land and Tax Reform ought also to protest against the gold standard. The majority of the members were not satisfied with this; if for no other reason than the one that the goal which we had set for ourselves would require our entire strength and time. So the followers of Silvio Gesell founded another "Free Land and Free Money League," which should not be confused with our society for Land and Tax Reform.

Meanwhile, the latter had lost no time. While its predecessor of Bern in 1913 had requested the council to adopt self-government in matters of community taxation, in the Spring of 1916 the Swiss society proposed to the same council the adoption of self-valuation of land sites, (with a penalty of loss of ownership for a valuation less than the real one) into what at that time was only an outline of the proposed law, or at any rate, into the taxation laws. This proposition originated with our tireless Bodenreform veteran, "Grossrat" Sam Scherz, of Bern.

We should have been glad to have based this self-valuation upon the real principle of Bodenreform, i.e., the separation of the value of the bare land and of the value of buildings and improvements. But since our tax laws do not recognize such a separation and our so-called progressive politicians are swayed by the opinions of the ignorant majority, they decided against the principle.

In Switzerland Bodenreform measures have been instituted in but few localities: In the cities of Basel, Zurich and Bern the right to build on small estates; in Zurich and Winterthur the tax according to common value, but only up to 1 promille; in some canton banks the cancelling of mortgages, which, since it is not obligatory, has not prevented at least one-half of Swiss lands from being mortgaged. The new Swiss civil law, by

separating land and buildings, has at least laid the foundation for the taxation of bare land.

But we are still far from carrying out the ideas of Henry George. The proposed innovations of Damaschke are not very familiar to our statesmen, not to speak of the less educated among the people.

Who is to blame for this? Those who have taken upon themselves the task of educating the people. If the daily press of Switzerland takes little notice of Bodenreform endeavors, it may be traced to two causes: first, to the previously mentioned hostile stand of the party politician; secondly, for the reason that among the Swiss Bodenreformers there is no one who can give his entire time to the work of winning them over. We cannot afford an organ of our own. Then, too, we say to ourselves, that we are more apt to get our Bodenreform ideas to the public, if we write for newspapers and magazines which do not bear the stamp of Bodenreform character.

In this instance, the elegantly gotten up monthly magazine *Schweizerland*, just entering upon its third year, which is open to the most extreme views, deserves special praiseworthy mention. In the February number of 1916 several questions of Bodenreform were minutely discussed.

As it is treated by the daily press, so also does science in Switzerland treat Bodenreform as a step-child. I know of only three instructors in the Swiss high schools who in their lectures or writings do justice to it: Prof. Dr. Max Weyerman, in Bern; Dr. Eugene Grossman, in Zurich, and Privatdozent Dr. Otto Karmin, in Geneva. Besides these, three private instructors may be mentioned, those who by means of their excellent writings have done much towards enlightenment on the subject: Dr. Ed. Näf in Wolfhausen (Zurich), H. Schatzman and Gustave Büscher in Zurich.

More surprising than the small number of scientific men who openly declare themselves for Bodenreform, is that so few of the common school teachers concern themselves with such questions. With these the cause is not academic learning which blinds them to the conditions and necessities of the present; nor

is it lack of instruction, since they have access to lectures and may be supplied with literature on the subject of Boden and Tax Reform, free of charge; but rather is it the spirit of the herd and the disinclination to be made uncomfortable.

The moral indignation of an Arnold Böcklin and a Gottfried Keller against land speculation has, unfortunately, not been transmitted to all of our modern Swiss masters of art, whose motto, alas, is only too often, *non olet*. Still there are among them a few who perceive the necessary relation between the earth and man, and battle against all things which would separate him from his source of life. I am not thinking now of the rather large number of poets who describe the charm of country life, but of two, who in their novels actually scourge speculation: Felix Moschlin of Arosa, in his novel *Amerika-Johann*, and George Reymond of Vevey, in his *Ferrevenale*.

Both are still young and of promising talent. May the poets in this way enlighten the people concerning their real interests, when those who pose as their leaders fail to do their duty.—E. L.