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The Future is Ours!

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

By Bue Björner, Denmark

As President of the "International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade" it gives me great pleasure to have the privilege of addressing this Conference. The Henry George Centenary Conference is being held under the joint auspices of the Henry George Foundation of America, The Henry George School of Social Science, and the International Union.

Henry George, America's great social philosopher, is known internationally. His epoch-marking and far-famed works have been translated into practically every civilized language, and in every country over the world we find men and women, who—for their knowledge of the social problems, yes, for, their whole view of life—are greatly indebted to Henry George, the great Son of a great Nation. Coming, as I do, from a country where the name of Henry George is known and esteemed almost as well as the names of our own great men, and where his thoughts have already set their stamp on practical legislation, and speaking on behalf of Georgeists throughout a score of other countries united in the organization, whose President I have the honour to be, I can only say that on the Centenary of the birth of Henry George we are very happy to be able to visit the great nation that gave birth to Henry George, and to meet here in the town, where he laid down his life, the men and women who are carrying on his work among his own people.

The objects of the International Union are: "To stimulate in all countries a public opinion favourable to permanent peace and prosperity for all peoples, through the progressive removal of the basic economic causes of poverty and war, as these causes are demonstrated in the writings of Henry George."

If we were pessimists, we might say that the development during the last three years since we last met at the London Conference in 1936 has altogether gone in the wrong direction and that the fulfilment of our objects is to-day more remote than ever before. But we cannot be pessimists; Georgeists naturally must be optimists. There are enough people

The Future is Ours

who are willing to take the world for what it is at present and such people, who like to call themselves "practical," carry quite a share of the responsibility for the adverse condition of the world to-day. We Georgeists will not take the world for what it is to-day, but for what it can be to-morrow.

We know that never before in the history of mankind has the enormous producing power of the world given such great chances for permanent peace and prosperity for all peoples. Truly enough, we see around us a world, where autarchy has taken the place of co-operation between nations, where "the transformation of popular government into despotism of the vilest and most degrading kind" is no longer a thing of the far future, a world in which "the sword again is mightier than the pen." But we know the reason for this. We know that only the inequalities in the distribution of wealth are responsible for such abasing conditions.

There are enough of the so-called practical men, who see democracies change into dictatorships, peaceful co-operation into warlike strife, and who seem to believe that this change is due to some mysterious powers beyond their control. But we Georgeists are more practical. We know that such conditions are not the will of the Creator. We know that it is the failure of balancing the technical and productive progress with the needs of those who produce, that causes poverty amidst wealth and forms the basis for economic and political crises within Nations as well as between Nations.

At first glance it might seem—at least to people of democratic countries—that it is the policies of the totalitarian states that are to blame for international conditions as they are to-day. But it must not be overlooked that again it is primarily the inequality in the distribution of wealth within these countries which has caused the change, politically and also mentally. Let us not take the symptoms of a malady for the cause of it; the inequality in the distribution of wealth is at the bottom of the world's problems to-day and at the bottom of the social problems in any one country.

In spite of all that is happening around us, we have still reason to be optimists. There is a widening general understanding of the truth that the real causes of poverty and war are of an economic nature. And in spite of the dark political aspects we find a manifest good-will to remove these economic hindrances to the peace and prosperity for all peoples.

As a member of the Danish National Committee of the International Chamber of Commerce I had the privilege to be one of the hosts to the Tenth Congress of the International Chamber of Commerce in Copenhagen this summer.

More than one thousand leading business men of forty-one countries from every part of the world met there to discuss the problem of how to bring about a world-wide co-operation, which is essential to the maintenance of peace. At the opening session at the Town Hall of Copen-

hagen, in the presence of H.M. King Christian, T.R.H. Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Ingrid, members of the Government and members of the Diplomatic Corps, the Past President of the I.C.C., Mr Thomas J. Watson, sounded the keynote of this remarkable Congress by stating that we can only bring about "World peace through world trade."

There may be other delegates to the I.C.C. Congress present here, who can confirm what pleasure it was to see that prominent business men of all nations, in spite of the most severe political tension between their countries, could in a mutual spirit of goodwill meet and discuss their individual and common problems. That delegates from democratic as well as from totalitarian nations could unite in stating that "the world can produce enough raw materials and manufactured goods to supply all the people of all countries with the necessities and comforts of life," that "lasting political stability and the settlement of outstanding economic issues are necessarily interdependent." They could unite in advocating "procedure and policies which will render unnecessary the movement of armies across frontiers and which will substitute therefor the increasing movement of goods, services and capital," and they could join in their declared objective "to help people everywhere to convert their longings for peace, security and prosperity into a practical programme of economic and human understanding."

Regardless of how you judge the recommendations that came from the I.C.C. Congress in Copenhagen, you must admit that the *spirit* of it was on the same lines that we pursue and was instrumental towards "stimulating in all countries a public opinion favourable to permanent peace and prosperity for all peoples" by advocating the removal of barriers to international trade and world-wide co-operation. Certainly there is reason for optimism for us, who wish to remove the basic economic causes of poverty and war : for the opinion expressed at the Copenhagen Congress has world-wide recognition, the spirit of it is to be found in the hearts of people everywhere, even if not with their leaders.

Of course the mere wish for international co-operation does not solve the problem. But the desire for opening up world trade will naturally focus the attention on the main problem, the inadequacy of the usual free trade argument and the real strength of the protection argument. The former President of the International Chamber of Commerce, Mr Fentener van Vlissingen, broached the question by stating that leading business men, who at Conferences have affirmed their belief in Free Trade, are too eager when their own difficulties meet them at home to sacrifice the ideals and to ask their government for protective measures for their own little sick industry. Others, who are also filled with the desire for international free trade, think of what is going to happen to their unemployment question at home.

This is where we, the disciples of Henry George, have a message to bring to the world.

The Future is Ours

It will be our task to explain that Free Trade means Free Production, and that fully to free production it is necessary not only to remove all taxes on production, but also to remove all other restrictions on production. In the words of Henry George: "True free trade requires that the active factor of production, Labour, shall have free access to the passive factor of production, Land. To secure this all monopoly of land must be broken up, and the equal right of all to the use of the natural elements must be secured by the treatment of the land as the common property in usufruct of the whole people."

Until this simple truth is recognized all efforts to bring about Free Trade between the nations are doomed beforehand. The inequalities in the distribution of wealth will remain as long as our laws and institutions uphold the right of the few to seize the natural resources of all; and it is this inequality that causes fear of unemployment and impoverishment of the working classes everywhere, and which has in our time revived obsolete autarchy tendencies and put us where we are to-day. There can be no real desire for progressive steps both in the production and interchange of goods, as long as such steps in the eyes of the masses just spell unemployment and poverty. We must establish the equality in the distribution in the simple way which Henry George explained it could be done: by removing taxes and imposts on production and instead collect the economic rent for public revenues.

Only through the economic emancipation that can be reached when there is no more speculation in land but where the access to land is free and where productive labour is no longer taxed heavily, can we restore man's confidence in being able to provide for himself.

This is, in short, the message that we who are gathered here have to bring to the world. And are we in a position to carry this message? Yes, we are indeed. Splendid work is being done by members and leaders of more than fifty Henry George organizations throughout the world in spreading the message to the public. Editors of and contributors to more than a score of Georgeist journals in various countries are devoting their efforts to advocating the ideas of Henry George, and numberless individuals work, through the political life or as unattached advocates, to bring the message into a world-wide apprehension. The work in the purely educational field has of late years found new form in the Henry George School of Social Science, which was started here in New York but has also, since the last International Conference, found its way to the Old World. Through the individual work of speakers and writers, through the work of the organizations, and through the work of the schools we have to-day a better chance than ever before for both creating and satisfying a wide-spread desire for enlightenment. In paying tribute to each and every one who is carrying on this important work to-day, let us not forget those who have done it in the past. "Human progress goes on as the advances made by one generation are secured as the common property of the next, and made the starting point for new advances." Exactly

the same is true for what progress our work may show. When we can say now : that never before have we had such a chance to make ourselves heard as we have to-day, then let us acknowledge our indebtedness to those who are no longer with us but who did toil for the truth that Henry George made clear and thus laid the foundation on which we are now building.

We have taken upon ourselves the work for a great cause. How soon that truth shall prevail which it is our work to make known depends now on ourselves. During this Congress we shall have the opportunity of hearing how far the ideas of Henry George have advanced in various countries—in practical legislation or otherwise. I know that what we hear, and the practical knowledge we obtain, will both incite us and enable us all to carry on, stronger than ever.

A world of people are waiting, who desire to convert their longings for peace, security and prosperity into a practical programme of economic adjustment. Certainly : the Future is ours !

For in the inspired teachings of Henry George we find the practical programme of economic adjustment that will not only secure a material prosperity in proportion to the existing power of production, and secure political peace as well, but will—by removing insecurity and fear—make possible a spiritual emancipation that we feel the world needs and desires to-day above anything else.

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