

Letters to the Editor

INFLUENCING THE LIBERALS

SIR,—I was frankly surprised to read in *LAND & LIBERTY* that Mr. Frank Dupuis had written a letter to (of all newspapers) *The Daily Telegraph* criticising the Liberal Party for their Brighton Assembly resolutions on the ground that they did not represent a policy for freedom.

I accept that the Liberal Party of 1966 does not speak out with the simplicity and force of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, but we are far more likely to move towards free trade, site-value rating and other desirable objects via the Liberal Party than through the policies of the other two parties; and to speak of forming another party as one correspondent did recently (not, I admit, Mr. Dupuis) is clearly ridiculous bearing in mind the grossly unfair electoral system we have.

Mr. Dupuis and others who think like him would (if they are Liberals) be much better employed working inside and for the Liberal Party and trying to influence their colleagues in the ways of freedom than by writing letters to a paper which is, to say the least, unsympathetic, if not downright hostile, to Liberalism of any brand, planned or free.

I have no doubt that Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman was right when he spoke in 1906 but who can say his message would have been the same sixty years later?

Yours faithfully,

M. H. BILLINGTON

Nuneaton, Warwickshire.

F. Dupuis writes: As my object was to arouse controversy on important principles, I was pleased to read Mr. Billington's protest, although, as far as I am aware, my letter did not stimulate any leading member of the Liberal Party to vindicate the principles of his party to readers of *The Daily Telegraph*, as I think such a criticism required. As that newspaper, reporting the Assembly, had described the Liberal Party as now "well to the left of the Labour Party," and no authoritative protest had been made, a restatement of the Liberal principles was surely overdue. I know other members of the party who, like myself, have subscribed to and worked for the Liberal Party during many years and are profoundly disturbed by the image presented by reports of the Assembly.

I have for many years tried to

promote serious discussion among Liberals, but as I find increasing evidence of subtle forces discouraging such efforts, I think it more useful to speak out rather than allow partisan feelings to prevent the expression of opinion.

WHERE THE SUBSIDIES GO

SIR,—The figures for commodity prices and farm rents given by John Cherrington, and quoted in "Miscellany" last month, are interesting, but Mr. Cherrington's conclusions (if he reached any) were not given.

The logical conclusion to which one is led was hinted at in your own comment, but maybe it should be more explicitly stated.

Thirty years ago there was a free market in agricultural produce, but today, after years of government supported prices, the market is distorted at almost every stage.

Little grain would be grown in Britain were it not for the substantial Exchequer contribution to the farmer to make up the difference between the average market price and the (much higher) guaranteed price.

This subsidy so increases the grain acreage, that livestock are moved on to poorer land, and then livestock farming has to be subsidised as well!

The effect of this extension of the margin of cultivation is, of course, to raise the economic rent of land and thus its purchase price.

Yours faithfully,

J. L. RIDLINGTON

Horsham, Sussex.

STEPS IN THE WRONG DIRECTION

SIR,—Land-value taxation as such does not involve government control of land. Under this system, provided he pays his rent, an occupier of land is left in control of his own plot and may do with it whatever he wishes, subject only to public health, safety and such like regulations.

It is wrong, therefore, to argue, as it sometimes is, that in the absence of LVT it is better that land should be owned by central or local government than by private individuals, on the grounds that the rent is accruing to the community. This is not a half step towards LVT; it is a half step towards land nationalisation, which is quite a different thing.

Public authorities are not gov-

erned by economic considerations. The use to which they put their land is governed by political, military or so-called social considerations. In addition, such authorities take an unreasonably long time to make up their minds on anything, and once they have land in their possession they are quite unwilling to let it go in case they might think of some use for it in the future. Local authorities are undoubtedly the largest hoarders of unused land in the country.

It is almost axiomatic, therefore, that land in the control of such bodies will not be put to its full potential use.

Thus the reason given in a recent circular from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, that in future surplus government land will first be offered to the local authority in whose area it lies "to ensure that land is put to its best use" is plain nonsense.

Whatever other reasons might be adduced in support of this decision—and the only valid one is the political prejudice of the Labour Government against private ownership—the decision is to be deplored, for it will mean that even more of our land will be sterilised or put to uneconomic use.

Rent should be publicly collected, but the development of land should be firmly in private hands.

Yours faithfully,

E. A. LAKE

Rochester, Kent.

RETROGRADE STEP

SIR,—The decision of the new Conservative-controlled Birmingham City Council to sell off "surplus" land not needed for municipal purposes is a shortsighted one. Although the Council intends to use the proceeds from such sales to finance current expenditure and thus alleviate the rate burden temporarily, in the long run the ratepayers will be the losers. In the years to come the value of the surrendered ground rents will be greatly enhanced and when the Council goes again into the land market, this time to buy, the ratepayers will have greater burdens to bear.

While the municipalisation of land is not a process that should be encouraged, the sale of publicly-owned land is to be deplored. A far more satisfactory arrangement would be for the City to lease its sites at reviewable ground rents, thus ensuring the recovery of publicly created revenue. Precedents for this type of transaction have been long established by the former London County Council, which has passed its valuable