

## LABOUR AND LAND AFTER THE WAR

"A time there was, ere England's griefs began,  
When every rood of ground maintained its man:  
For him light labour spread her wholesome store,  
Just gave what life required but gave no more,  
His best companions, innocence and health,  
And his best riches, ignorance of wealth."

In an article "The War and the Land Question," appearing in *LAND VALUES* for June, 1915, I described some of the probable social results of the war on the analogy of those resulting from previous wars, and I urged, as an answer to the many questions which were perplexing us then, and would perplex us still more as the war went on, the solution of the Land Question on the basis of the destruction of the Land Monopoly.

I spoke of great reaction both during and after the war, and all that I feared has come. For what do we see all around us but reaction, aye, and reaction that will continue long after peace is declared unless friends of the people are up and doing. The growth of reaction can be easily traced. We had the Paris Conference, where many one-time Free Traders, whose better judgment was overcome by feelings of revenge engendered of the war and by enthusiasm for our ally, urged the imposition of tariffs after the war. Then more recently we have had the speech of one of the greatest of pre-war Radical Ministers speaking kindly of Colonial Preference and saying it would not raise prices. The increase of child labour, too, has gone on, and parents and employers have been round the schools to take young children to work before their time; and then, as if they could not wait until the little ones were older, I saw it suggested not long ago that military drill and discipline should be introduced into the schools. And besides all this one of the most cherished pillars of our Constitution, Ministerial Responsibility and Parliamentary Control of Expenditure, to say nothing of the Liberty of the Press, has been lost in the general conflagration, for England is now governed by a Bureaucracy, money is spent like water, and the country's representatives have no say in the matter.

Had the Land Question been attacked boldly before the war and the taxation of Land Values imposed, there would have been far more land than at present under cultivation, and the crisis in the country's food supplies would have been far less severe. Given a good stiff tax on the unimproved value of land, we should not have had the miserable spectacle of our public men all over the country begging almost uncultivable tracts of land from reluctant landowners in order to cultivate potatoes, when the country was threatened with starvation; no, on the contrary, we should have had the landowners only too willing to get someone to take over their land and use it. Neither would it have been necessary to bribe the farmers, lest perchance they should be somewhat out of pocket, to grow more wheat, for with security and easily obtainable land wheat would have been abundant. And with free access to the land no minimum wage would have been necessary, for with landowners seeking for cultivators for their lands, wages would have been in excess of what is now assigned by law as the minimum.

What will be the judgment of our descendants some fifty years hence on our war-time land troubles? No high opinion will be held of farmers who waited for the Government to guarantee them against loss at a time when thousands were giving their all, nor of the Government who showed themselves so obviously afraid of the Landed Interest. Much has been heard of those soldiers who, when their fighting days are over, will prefer an open-air life and work on the land to going back to a stuffy office, and there have been many schemes for settling these on the land. But many heroes have already returned, and what has been done for them? What is being done in preparation for the time when all return once more? The Government has acquired some few hundred acres for this purpose, but what are they among so many, and the price and situation of these

will probably entice but few. The Government has no great scheme in hand, such as it should have, for opening up the land to all and making access easy. It should be prepared to hand back to the millions when they return the land for which they have fought, and which their ancestors held indeed in days of old.

Before the war our annual expenditure was about £200,000,000, and if the war goes on till the end of this year the interest on the various loans will itself amount to something like £300,000,000. How is it proposed to raise this enormous sum annually, for before the war the cry was that taxation was crushing industry? Will the Government still continue to confiscate wealth, tax industry and levy tariffs on food and all articles entering this country? This will soon cripple industry and have the effect of widening the breach between rich and poor as such taxes are gradually shifted on to the backs of the consumers. Either this method must be used and vested interests set up, of which the beginnings are now apparent, or there must be Taxation of Land Values, the taking by the Government for the use of all of the great communal fund created by all.

Looking thus at some of the fearful legacies that will be left us by the war we cannot help wondering if there is any hope for labour and where such hope can be looked for. There has been a great National Mission of Hope, and I read one of its pamphlets entitled "An Appeal to Labour," expecting to find hope for better times held out to labour and also some suggestion of means whereby a better social state could be brought about; but I searched in vain. We are told that the "Church is not a society for social reform"; but perhaps if it had been more of that it would not be so out of touch with so many of the people to-day. "The highest happiness belongs to the man who, regardless of property, feels in the course of his daily work his whole nature developing."

How, I ask, can a man feel this when he has to toil hard all day for a pittance and then go home at night to a miserable slum dwelling, knowing that he has that day helped to enrich others and been robbed of part of his just earnings? And what of the man who cannot find work, for there will probably be many such after the war? The Church has always held out such "Spiritual Hope" and "Moral Advice," and that is all very well in its place, but to offer it as in any way a solution of the great social problem, the persistence of poverty amidst wealth, is like offering a stone when asked for bread. The first thing needful is to feed the people, to take away from them the care and worry of mere animal existence; then and only then will they be able to feel their whole nature developing day by day. Let the Church examine the Land Monopoly and the great army of landless and see if here all is in accordance with the Divine Law. Of hope after the war for what the workers call "better times" there is none in this pamphlet.

The greatest wealth is found where population is dense and there is great division of labour, not where it is sparse, and the presence of the very poor amidst great wealth is accounted for by the fact that the poor are the slaves of those who hold the land, and the communal value of the land, which is created by all and should be enjoyed by all, goes into the pockets of the landowners. It is not to be wondered at that the poor often attribute their hard lot to the presence of too many people in the land. They live in an overcrowded slum, and for every vacant job there are many applications. But the matter that should cause the greatest concern is not the low birth-rate but the terrible mortality amongst infants, which, of course, considerably lowers the effect of the real birth-rate. At the annual meeting of the Dundee Social Union the Rev. Dr. Watson, chairman of the Scottish Christian Social Union, said, "Last year we lost nine men per hour, while we lost twelve babies per hour." That is the terrible thing to cause concern, for practically all these deaths are preventible and are due directly or indirectly to Poverty. The horizon of the town dwellers

is naturally limited, their whole lives are stunted, and they do not see the broad acres around the town and beyond simply calling for labour.

Break down the monopoly, make the landlord beg for tenants instead of the would-be tenant having to move heaven and earth to get a holding, and there will no longer be apparent over-population, nor any elaborate and costly schemes necessary for settling soldiers on the land. Taxation of land values, security of tenure and a bank credit will soon repeople the countryside with a smiling peasantry: and only when this reform is passed will antagonism between labour and capital cease. Capital is the servant of labour, and between them there is no real antagonism. But through the evil influence of land monopoly has been evolved the state known as "Capitalism," where industry is ruled by vast aggregates of capital. This it is that oppresses labour, for with the land-door locked labour has no refuge.

Throw open the Land and Capitalism as an oppressive force will disappear.

But although the times are dark and things look bad for labour after the war, I am sure there is yet great hope for better times. Look at the oppression and corruption there were in Russia and how black everything appeared, and yet, in the midst of all this seeming hopelessness, the greatest tyranny of modern times was cast down in a few days, and a freedom inaugurated such as we have ourselves not yet obtained. Many of our Members of Parliament, aye, and Ministers in high places too, have evidently forgotten the many pledges they made not so very long ago, to put a measure of taxation of land values on the Statute Book; but happily the torch is still held aloft by the hand of the faithful in the Land Values Group and by the many friends of mankind over the country who are working in this direction for liberty and justice.

Now, more than ever, advocates for the Taxation of Land Values are needed.

Let the Churches who are wanting to do much for Labour boldly demand the abolition of Land Monopoly even as men of God of old time were not afraid to demand it.

Let everyone also who loves his fellow man look into the question, and if he finds it good, give as much of his time as possible to spreading the light which has come to him. Now, then, is the time for true friends of the workers to get busy. Do not let this great opportunity slip, or the time for reform may pass for years. Strike while the iron is hot, and let the cry be "Land and Liberty!" The Russians have overthrown their tyrant, let us rise up and overthrow the tyrant Land Monopoly, who has reigned for long in our country.

F. G.

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### THE SELLING VALUE OF LAND

The following letter appeared in the January number of the *LIBERATOR* (New Zealand). We publish it as an original and helpful treatment of some of the objections to the taxation of land values.

Sir,—In the September number of *LAND VALUES* (London) I find a reprint from the *LIBERATOR* of correspondence showing some of the difficulties arising from the n isaming of the Georgan reform.

The doctrine which Henry George gave to the world, the practice of which would abolish poverty and make this world well worth living in, is:—"That rent (an annual payment in respect of sites upon the earth, apart from the hire of any property produced by man, which may be attached to them), is due to the presence and activities of the people—is made by the people—and therefore belongs to the people, and is not the property of any individuals. It should be collected for the purposes of government."

The chain of reasoning set forth by Henry George is:—

Man has a right to be upon this earth.

None have rights not equally possessed by other men.

Natural rights are equal.

Each has a right to himself, his powers and faculties.

Whatever he produces unaided is *his* against the world.

Property is sacred.

Each has an equal right to the use of the raw material of the universe.

Shortly, these are the self-evident truths the master takes as the basis of the reform which he offers to the world.

Ownership is best defined as "the right to sole use and disposal of the thing owned."

Man finds himself surrounded by "matter and force," which he can neither increase nor diminish; but he can move it, shape it, combine or separate it, and prepare it, to serve to gratify his desires.

What the world is now suffering from is, that we have abandoned the policy introduced by the first of the Norman Kings, who claimed, in the name of the people, the rent of all estates, as the fund for meeting the cost of government.

But in later centuries corrupt kings and parliaments sold to estate holders the privilege of holding their estates free of rent to the State for ever. This was called "the title in fee simple," and is the title under which land is now generally held.

The sale of this privilege was an immoral transaction; no king or government ever had the right to sell this privilege, and it is immoral for us to permit the continuance of this privilege; the people have never ceased to have the right to collect for public services the annual rental value of estate in land, apart from the hire of property due to human labour, which belongs entirely to the owners of that property.

Man's rights have been always the same rights. They are inherent, are born in man, and cannot be taken from him, nor new rights given—he may be prevented from enjoying or exercising his rights, but that does not extinguish them.

Though this privilege is sold by the governments of various countries, nevertheless, it is still *stealing*, but it is the crime of the whole community—not merely of the estate-holders or "landlords," as they are now termed. It is an institutional crime and we must abolish the institution.

Because of the landlord being permitted to steal the fund which should cover the costs of government, governments have to use the force of their authority, to take from the individuals forming the community portions of their private wealth under the name of "taxes."

But to take from men by force, fraud, or stealth, *what is theirs*, is stealing. Thus, because governments permit the stealing of public wealth, those governments are forced to steal from private individuals part of their private wealth.