

the benefit you enjoy by having possession of that stance in the community; but having paid the Land Value Tax or Rate, you may now build houses, shops or factories, add bedrooms or bathrooms or otherwise improve and develop, it is all for the good of the whole nation, and your assessment will not be increased. You will pay more only if the site increases in value, and that increase will not be due to what you do or spend, but on what the community do, in improvements, or in increase of numbers, or increase in general industry."

Now again, take the Development Charge:—Every new building by private enterprise, every addition (if over one-tenth of existing bulk or value), every change of use of *buildings*, is to be penalised by this iniquitous charge, levied *only* when *developed*—that thing that is most desired in communities of men of all kinds—takes place!

I am not surprised that the Conservative Party is saying next to nothing since the Act secures to the land-owners the whole of the *existing* economic rents, and to

those who have suffered loss of land value, £300,000,000 of the taxpayers' money is to be given. In fact, this Town and Country Planning Act, 1947, through its Central Land Board part, establishes land monopoly more securely than before and makes true land reform dangerously near to impossible until the Act is finally abolished (the bad with the good) by the inevitable communism which will surely come if justice is not instituted by radical reforms.

The buying of the land value, which was created by the whole people and not the owners, is to cost every man, woman and child in the country over £6 per head. *But*, a true Liberal Party would have instituted a "raging tearing propaganda" to have this Act (Central Land Board part) shown up in its true Socialist-Tory colours and roused the people to demand its repeal and the substitution of true land reform. Unless the Party advocate the latter, making it the chief plank, there will never be a Liberal Party of any consequence whatever.

## A MAGISTRATE OPPOSES STATE COERCION

ON July 1, Mr. R. W. Bell, of Acton, in Suffolk, and a Magistrate of Long Melford Bench, was prosecuted for the offence of "failing to affix a stamp on a National Insurance Card." It is interesting to note that despite the personnel of the Bench which tried the case—to which we will refer later—and Mr. Bell's having admitted the fact, it took two hours for the magistrates to come to the decision of fining him £10 and costs, in addition to payment of the compulsory contributions required by the National Insurance Act.

The facts of the case, many of which were not reported but for the accuracy of which we can vouch, throw considerable light on the tendencies of a coercive regime, and are likely to evoke some questions in the minds of those concerned with more than their present and immediate activities and advantages.

Before the Act came into force, in July last year, Mr. Bell informed the local agents of the Ministry that he did not intend to join the compulsory scheme, basing his refusal on the grounds that as a Christian he could not reconcile a measure of such universal coercion with Christian doctrine as he understood it. He did not know if the National Insurance Act, as in the case of some other coercive Acts, made provision for "conscientious objection," but as he understood that considerable powers of amendment and interpretation had been delegated by Parliament to the Minister he considered such an objection might possibly be allowed. Alternatively, as had occurred in respect of many other Acts, the validity of some of its clauses might not be established until after test cases in the Courts.

Mr. Bell was prepared to contest such a case. As he happened to be a Justice of the Peace he would be obliged if, before prosecuting him, the Minister would give due warning so that he could resign his Commission and thus avoid the anomaly of a Magistrate being prosecuted before the Bench of which he was a member. Meanwhile, if such a case happened to come before him, he could retire in favour of another magistrate or, if necessary, he was prepared to administer the law according to its current interpretation until he was more fully informed of the possibility of amendment or different interpretation.

At the subsequent prosecution, almost a year after this correspondence commenced, the Minister's agent declared that the Minister, Mr. Griffiths, had ordered the case to be brought only "reluctantly" and after "great thought." This great thinking, however, did not go so far as to give Mr. Bell any reply to his specific enquiry, nor did it extend to giving him any warning before he received a summons to appear before the Boxford—not Long Melford—Court.

To his original request, addressed to the local agent of the Ministry, Mr. Bell received only a sheaf of explanatory literature, none of which answered his specific enquiry. No other communication was received from the Ministry with the exception, months afterwards, of a letter from the Area Inspector intimating he intended calling upon Mr. Bell. The Inspector subsequently saw Mr. Bell's solicitors, but from that interview nothing definite transpired.

It seems, however, that the Ministry was not inactive. On February 21 of this year the Permanent Secretary to the Lord Chancellor wrote to Mr. Bell: "The Lord Chancellor has been informed by the Minister of National Insurance that you have declined to pay contributions . . . This has a bearing on your office as Justice of the Peace . . . I am to invite you to come to London to discuss your attitude."

Instead of going to London Mr. Bell replied that examination of his letters to the Ministry would show that his refusal on conscientious grounds to pay contributions would not affect his duties as Justice of the Peace until he received notice of prosecution, and as he would then resign the question would not arise. Although the Permanent Secretary in his reply said "he thought he had seen" all the correspondence, he considered it remarkable that a Justice of the Peace should claim a right to disobey an Act of Parliament on conscientious grounds, when Parliament has made no provision for a conscientious objection." In his next letter Mr. Bell remarked that as he presumed he would eventually be prosecuted by the Minister of National Insurance, with whom the Lord Chancellor seemed in close collaboration, it was somewhat unusual he should be obliged to carry on a correspondence likely to divulge to the prosecution all the grounds of the defendant's case.

In his last letter, of March 19, the Secretary replied that, "The Lord Chancellor is not so much concerned with the question whether you are prosecuted as he is with the attitude you have already adopted towards the Act . . . It appears you are willing to resign when you are prosecuted, but my difficulty is to know why you do not resign at once."

It would appear that the kind of Justice of the Peace now desired by our rulers is a person who will not only interpret the laws impartially and to the best of his ability, whatever his private opinion—and everyone will admit this is a reasonable requirement—but will also, in addition to obeying every law and every clause of delegated legislation in his personal capacity, refrain from adopting any attitude likely to arouse in others a disposition to examine the justice of the law.

From this it appears that we do not need magistrates who by their known integrity of character will inspire genuine respect for the law; we need men and women remarkable for passive obedience to the rulers. The latter would certainly recommend themselves to a Hitler or a Stalin, but in his speech on the second reading of the recent Justices of the Peace Bill, Lord Jowitt seemed to be especially concerned with the independence of voluntary magistrates. As the Bill itself involves the suppression of many ancient local Courts there may be some confusion in Lord Jowitt's mind. Most who have given thought to the subject would probably agree that with the type, multiplicity and compulsions of current legislation—especially delegated legislation—magistrates of exceptionable obedience to authority, rather than persons who suffer from scruples of conscience, are not only more convenient but almost requisite for our rulers' purposes.

Two coincidences connected with Mr. Bell's prosecution have not altogether escaped local notice, though not mentioned in the Press. About the time the Lord Chancellor's Secretary was in correspondence with Mr. Bell an additional member was appointed to the neighbouring Bench of Boxford, in the person of a local clergyman well-known not only as a prominent member of the local Labour Party, but also for his association with Mr. Platts Mills, M.P., and his outspoken Communist sympathies. And when the Ministry took their case against Mr. Bell they decided to have it considered not at Long Melford, in which sphere of jurisdiction the offence was committed, but at the village of Boxford which, it happens, is far less central and convenient for Press and public. Consequently, at the hearing, when Mr. Bell declared he was unable in his conscience to reconcile the coercive "Gospel according to Beveridge" with the non-coercive teaching of Jesus there was on the Bench a clergyman of known Communist sympathies ready to expound the new theology of Christian coercion.

We have no evidence to suggest any deliberate connection between these occurrences, but the incidents certainly tend to confirm the opinion of those who believe that however genuine may be the dislike of Fabians, Welfare Staters and others of similar leanings to avowed and orthodox Communists, the logic of events inevitably draws all such bodies into concerted action against traditional freedom of life, thought and conscience.

All who value these traditions will feel wholehearted gratitude and admiration for the courageous example set by Mr. Bell. When one considers the discouragement attending the action of so many professional and other bodies affected by regimentation—allowing their original

objections on principle to become weakened, perverted and eventually forgotten when the "appropriate Ministry" offered them more public money—it is particularly inspiring to see one man ready to stand out against the rulers, scribes and Pharisees in exactly that spirit which has proved in the past to be the forerunner of movements which have contributed to the elevation of humanity.

Such movements, however, will arise and gather force more quickly, and achieve more permanent effect if, in addition to repudiating the principle of coercion, reformers will acknowledge the obligation to work out honestly in their own minds an alternative and just solution to the difficulties which coercive systems purport to solve. The National Insurance Act, after all, is one of those many systems of coercion advocated by numbers of well-meaning but confused people (as well as by others by no means confused!) to solve the problem of poverty: the enigma of modern civilisation that, despite stupendous progress in the arts of producing wealth, the great mass of the people, failing the coercive re-distribution of wealth now almost universal, would be economically helpless to a degree unknown in primitive societies. It is the policy of this journal to draw the attention of all genuine seekers of the solution for this problem to the effect on society of a land system which confers on one person or section of people the power to prevent others from having access to the necessary element on which men must live, and from which they must draw the essential materials on which every moment of their existence depends.

Without in any way diminishing our respect for those rare spirits ready to oppose coercion on grounds of conscience, we would point out that there exists also a moral obligation to seek the truth concerning this question of poverty, and in doing so not to ignore the influence of land, which the slightest exertion of common observation or independent thinking will show to be paramount in every economic operation.

F. D. P.

## INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR LAND VALUE TAXATION AND FREE TRADE

### Objects

**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. Specifically, towards the realization of these objects, the Union favours the raising of public revenues by taxes and rates upon the value of land apart from improvements in order to secure the economic rent for the community and the abolition of taxes, tariffs, or imposts of every sort that interferes with the free production and exchange of wealth.**

### Membership

**Membership is open to all persons, irrespective of sex, race, or nationality, who in good faith sign a written declaration of adherence to the objects of the Union, and pay a minimum annual subscription equivalent to five shillings sterling (or \$1, U.S.A. and Canada). Additional subscription for the service of the monthly journal, "Land & Liberty," is 5s., or \$1, yearly.**