

of man—the rights of the people to the land, and the right of the producer to what he produces, all customs, laws and institutions notwithstanding.—A. W. M.

HOUSING DELAYS

In opening his housing campaign at Nottingham on Monday, Dr. Addison expressed disappointment at the slow rate of progress being made in some cases. He pointed out to the representatives present from the counties of Nottingham, Leicester, Derby, Rutland, and Lincoln, which form a single region for housing purposes, that while there were 148 local authorities in the area, up to that date the Local Government Board had received proposals of one kind and another from only 44 of them. This is certainly a small proportion, and it is to be hoped that greater activity will soon prevail in the district. At the same time it is only fair to remark that while in this case the delay appears to be due largely to the local authorities themselves, this is not by any means always the case.

Sometimes there is serious and undue departmental delay, and in many other cases progress is still being held up by the demands of landowners for excessive prices for land for housing purposes. Against these delays a strong protest has been made recently on behalf of the Town Council of St. Helens. It was pointed out that the council had been engaged from February last right up to the present time in efforts to secure land, to obtain the district valuer's estimate of its value, and to get the sanction of the L.G.B. to a loan for its purchase. In this case it appears that the local authority has at least as much cause for complaint and disappointment as the L.G.B. itself may have in some other instances.

On this point we are aware that the L.G.B., in a white paper issued recently, expressed the view that the maximum time that should elapse between the approval of housing plans by the Board and the submission of a provisionally accepted tender for building should not be more than five weeks. If this could be adhered to it would undoubtedly remove any ground for complaint, but against this statement must be placed that of the Chairman of the Public Health Committee of the City of Manchester, who states that he has calculated that, according to the procedure laid down by the L.G.B. itself, it would take nine months to carry through a building scheme from its initiation to the stage of getting contracts for the erection of the houses. There is a good deal of discrepancy between five weeks and nine months, and most of those who have had experience of Government Departments will be inclined to think that the longer period is likely to be nearer the mark in many cases.

As already stated, one of the chief difficulties in the way of prompt action arises from trouble about the acquisition of land and the question of price. Referring to this question and the work of the district valuers in connection therewith, Dr. Addison mentioned thirteen schemes in which the landowners asked £56,000 for land valued by the district valuers at only £35,000. Eventually this land was secured for £38,000—a considerable reduction on the exorbitant amount originally demanded. But this reveals a fruitful source of delay tending to prevent that prompt action which everyone now desires to see taken.—From the "Municipal Journal," June 20th.

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COAL MINES AND THE STATE

Taxation of Land Values the Solution

(Extract from address delivered by Colonel H. S. Murray, Chairman of Stanley Bros., Ltd., at the general meeting of that company in Nuneaton, on June 25th.—BIRMINGHAM POST Report.)

I am sure you will consider the balance sheet very satisfactory so far as the figures go, and that it more than justifies the payment of the proposed dividend. It would not have been so satisfactory by a good deal had we not received the contribution of the Coal Controller, but, of course, on the other hand, the trade would not have been controlled, and we should have been masters in our own house. I don't know what the future has in store for us, but it seems to me the present method of making up profits to the losing collieries engaged in the home trade, by taking the surplus profits from collieries engaged in export trade, where they are allowed to charge much higher prices for coal, is a rotten system.

You will, no doubt, have been following the extraordinary pantomime just closed in London called a Commission on the Coal Industry. The late Lord Beaconsfield once defined a Royal Commission as "a roundabout means of finding out what everybody knows already," but this Commission has not confirmed any previous knowledge, and has made confusion worse confounded. The public have been bewildered by the most contradictory evidence dictated by prejudice and partisanship. It was stated in the interim report issued by Justice Sankey and three other members of the Commission that "even upon the evidence already given the present system of ownership and working in the coal industry stands condemned." Now it is difficult to see how such a statement can be justified, unless, indeed, we condemn every other industry in the country as well. It is easy to find fault with any industry, and the whole industrial system, indeed the whole social system, stands equally condemned on such a basis. There is waste and extravagance in the cotton, in the woollen industries, and these terms may be equally applied, together with that of gross inefficiency, to the great industry of agriculture. But whatever criticism may be applied to these main industries, an industry carried on by Government, in respect of waste, extravagance, and inefficiency, is the abomination of all. It would, no doubt, suit some of us very well to have our mines nationalised, and get out of worry and responsibility at a fair price from the Government, especially those who have only undertakings of average merit. Indeed, I have found mine owners enthusiastically in favour of it, but I did not fail to notice at once that they had either indifferent or losing businesses. For the country it would be ruinous.

Mr. Smillie was able to show up the iniquity of the royalty system, whereby large sums are paid to men who take no part in supplying the country with coal, and who merely levy tribute on what rightfully should belong to the community. To abolish royalties, however, would not help to increase the output of coal, or improve the mining industry. Undoubtedly royalties should be paid to the right people, namely, the community, and that can be done by taxation, not necessarily by nationalisation. . . .

The present control, which the war may have rendered temporarily necessary, should gradually be abolished, and the industry be carried on in freedom as formerly. After that, the remedy is one of taxation, not nationalisation, with its waste, mismanagement, and corruption. The mines should be taxed on their site value, and in proportion to the value of the deposits of coal. This means the nationalisation of coal, not the nationalisation

of mines, which is an entirely different proposition. To nationalise the mines would mean the management of the mines by Government or by committees—a hopeless and ruinous proposition; whereas the nationalisation of the coal would merely mean the collection of a tax in proportion to value of the coal, whereby the whole community would be benefited, and efficiency of management maintained. By this method the mines blessed with coal of rich quality and in favourable situations would contribute heavily to the burdens of the State, while those of a poorer quality would be spared, and equally enabled to produce coal for the public benefit, the capital expended in both cases getting a fair return and labour well rewarded. Indeed, the question of the coal industry is merely a part of the great land question, where, I am firmly convinced, the only just and possible solution lies in the Taxation of Land Values, apart from all improvements on the land

LIBERAL PARTY POLITICS

A Lead from Manchester

After prolonged consideration, the Manchester Liberal Federation has issued a Programme of Liberal Policy which was finally adopted at a Conference of Representatives from the ten Manchester parliamentary divisions on May 23rd and 24th. Copies of this radical pronouncement can be had, price 1d. each, from the Secretary of the Federation, 16, Princess Street, Manchester. On Finance and the Land Question the following declarations are made:—

As far as possible, taxation should be direct and derived mainly from the following sources: Income Tax, Super-Tax, Death Duties, Taxation of Land Values, Excise, Amusements.

There should be no extension or renewal of the subsidy on corn, which should be abolished as early as possible.

The duties on tea, sugar, and all foodstuffs should be abolished.

An early measure should be introduced to make better provision for rendering the land accessible to the people.

The present cumbersome and expensive procedure for the sale and transfer of land should be simplified and cheapened, and in order to check the abuses arising from the withholding of land from its proper use, all land should be taxed and rated on its unimproved value. The said value to be fixed by the owners thereof, subject to the right of the Local Authority or the State to purchase the same compulsorily at the price fixed by the owner, without specifying the purpose for which it is required.

Land value and building value should be separately assessed, rated, and taxed, the building and other improvements to be gradually freed from the burden of rating and taxation by the transfer of their proportion of the burden to the land.

The compulsory acquisition of land immediately required by the State, or Local Authority, for the housing of the people, and for small holdings and allotments, should be on the basis of the pre-war Government valuation, and not at the present artificially inflated value.

In order to liquidate "a large part of the War Debt," the Federation advocates a graduated capital levy on all personal capital above a £2,000 minimum, and payable if necessary over a term of years.

The Conference resolved that the Programme in its final form, as endorsed and adopted by this Conference, be forwarded to the National Liberal Federation, with a request that it be given earnest consideration, with a view to its being placed before the Council of the National Liberal Federation for adoption at the forthcoming annual meeting of that Federation.

MR. PHILIP SNOWDEN ON THE LAND QUESTION

Mr. Philip Snowden, speaking at a public Conference held on May 24th, under the auspices of the Land Nationalisation Society in the Memorial Hall, London, said he could not remember any previous propagandism which made such a great impression as the Coal Mines Commission. He had been studying the speeches made by certain notorious politicians during the last five years, made for the purpose of encouraging the people not to be down-hearted, and he noted innumerable promises that when the war drums ceased to throb a New Jerusalem would be established in England. They were there that afternoon to demand the redemption of these promises, and they put forward this proposal because they knew there could be no New Jerusalem whose foundations were not built upon the principle of common ownership of the land.

This question was, with the exception of the placing of international relations upon a basis of justice, the most important of all problems. There could be no reconstruction to benefit the people, nothing more than tinkering, except by dealing drastically with the land problem. The evils of the land system were patent even to any wayfarer.

He was not concerned to argue the people's claim to the land except upon the one broad principle of human justice. He was not concerned to prove whether God gave the land to the people by the promise in His Book, or whether the land was given by some dissolute monarch to the sons of a favourite mistress. He cared not to discuss the methods by which the barons obtained possession of the land. He cared not whether the landowner could produce formidable parchment deeds.

He based the people's claim to the land upon this straight principle of justice, that where the people's rights were menaced or injured by the existence of individual rights, that fact alone was the supreme justification for the revocation of all individual rights.

Until they had abolished landlordism root and branch, every other attempt at reform was building upon the sands. Every reform not based on common ownership of the land was simply subsidising landlordism. Every social reform increased the economic rent of land. Therefore, unless they were going to continue to waste their efforts by tinkering with social questions as in the past, they must concentrate upon this fundamental question, to secure the land for the people.—(From the "Land Nationaliser," June, 1919.)

The tenants of 300 municipal houses at Dudley petitioned the Town Council yesterday against the Council's proposal to increase the rents by 6d. to meet the increased rates. They stated that they were unanimously resolved to strike if the demand were persisted in, as the houses were not worth the rent now being charged.—*The Times*, May 7th, 1919.