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MR. HERBERT MORRISON'S BACKSLIDING

IN THE debate on February 15 on the White Paper on local government (the main proposal in which was the setting up of a boundary commission to readjust the areas of local authorities) some references were made to rating and the burden of local expenditure. Replying to the discussion on behalf of the Government, Mr. HERBERT MORRISON (Home Secretary) said:—

"The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Lipson) referred to the rating system and asked: 'Is it the last word in wisdom?' I do not know. I only say this: Once upon a time I plastered the walls of London with the slogan: 'Vote for the Labour Party and a municipal Income Tax' A few weeks after the election—which we did not win, but in which we had made considerable progress, as usual—the hon. Member for Bow and Bromley (Mr. Key), who was then prominently associated, as he still is, with local government work in Poplar, came to my office and asked, 'How much income do you think Poplar will get out of this municipal Income Tax of yours?' It was rather a shock, and I must confess I was rather doubtful about it myself. Since then the walls of London have not seen any posters about a municipal Income Tax.

"I could make a considerable speech against the rating system, but the trouble is to find something that is better. What we have done as the years have gone on, is to merge the rating system, which started in 1601 under Queen Elizabeth, with the device of the grant-in-aid, so that you have a fusion of national taxation and all its elasticity, with the rating system and its admitted lack of elasticity. I do not say that that is perfect, but I think there is more to be said for it than, perhaps, one would think at first sight. I cannot think of anything better myself. . . ."

This is a very strange and far from candid statement. There is a great deal more of the history of Mr. Morrison and the London Labour Party than one would dream of from his speech, and one cannot help thinking of the latin maxim which may be translated: To suppress the truth is to suggest the false.

At a London County Council election subsequent to that referred to, the Labour Party won a majority on a programme which included the rating of land values. That was in 1934. The London County Council then instructed

its Finance Committee (of which the chairman was Mr. Charles (now Lord) Latham to consider the matter. The Council, under the leadership of Mr. Morrison, approved a report of the Finance Committee advocating the rating of site values, and urging that the Government should introduce legislation for this purpose. In 1937 the Labour Party, still pressing for the rating of site values, gained a still larger majority on the L.C.C. As there was no hope of the Government doing anything, the London County Council then introduced a Bill for the purpose of initiating the rating of site values in London. The Speaker ruled this Bill out of order as a subject for private bill procedure. Mr. Morrison, still leader of the L.C.C., and a member of Parliament, moved in the House of Commons, on February 15, 1939 (just six years prior to the speech we have quoted from) for leave to bring in the Bill as a public bill. There voted for this motion 114 Labour members and 21 of other parties, and against it 229. Mr. Morrison's speech on that occasion

is on record. He was then able to think of something better than the existing rating system.

It may also be of interest to recall that although the hoardings of London saw no more posters advocating a local income tax, they did see some advocating the rating of site values. One of these read: "Herbert Morrison says: 'Make the landowner pay rates.' When he pays his share, yours will be lighter." The electors also saw some very attractively printed and clearly phrased leaflets, issued by the London Labour Party, which Mr. Morrison specially advised local Labour parties to purchase and circulate. We reproduce two of these below. We think that they state the case forcefully and accurately. Can we believe that Mr. Morrison has suddenly forgotten these and all that he has said and written in favour of the rating of site values? or has he changed his mind? The electors of London, at least, have a right to demand from him an explanation of where he now stands and where the London Labour Party stands.

Leaflets issued by the London Labour Party

THE CASE FOR A RATE ON SITE VALUES

The L.C.C. has a great new rating plan spreading the cost of London's government more fairly.

THE POSITION TO-DAY

Rates are levied entirely on houses and buildings—and are paid by the occupiers, not the owners. No rates are levied on the land itself—London's life and work makes its land worth a hundred or a thousand times more than land in the country. The landowner pockets his huge rents, but pays nothing back to the London community.

LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL'S PROPOSAL

Levy a moderate rate of 2s. in the £ on the annual value of land. Thus get a revenue of some £3,000,000 a year, make the landowner pay his share, spread the burden of rates more evenly and relieve the present ratepayers.

The L.C.C. is asking the consent of Parliament to do this. See that reactionary vested interests do not prevent fair play for London ratepayers. WRITE TO YOUR M.P. ABOUT IT!

1. Without roads, drains, hospitals, schools, parks and police, town land would have no value. Who provides these things? The L.C.C. or other local

authority. *The landowner should help pay for them.*

2. One of the L.C.C.'s biggest jobs is housing. It has to pay heavy prices for land. Some landowners who pocket these huge sums have been paying very small rates on their land as "agricultural," and since 1929, no rates at all. For the land for its four big "cottage" estates the price paid by the L.C.C. represented nearly six times the value on which the municipality had, before 1929, been receiving rates on the land. This hits the L.C.C.'s tenants and all ratepayers. *Landlords should pay rates on the true value of their land.*

3. At present, rates are levied only on the use made of land, largely in proportion to the use made of it. *Make all land pay, in proportion to its value, and spread the burden more fairly.*

4. A rate on site values works perfectly in many parts of the Empire and Europe. In scores of cities the whole of the rate is on site values.

The rating of site values, like every other reform promoted in the interest of the general body of citizens, is bitterly opposed by the big vested interests—in