

LAND & LIBERTY

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LABOUR AND AGRICULTURE

There has recently appeared a pamphlet by Lord Addison entitled *Labour's Policy for the Countryside* and published by the Labour Party. How far the Labour Party feels itself committed to the details of the proposals here made we do not know, but they must in the circumstances be regarded as in some degree authoritative. The implications of the policy outlined certainly deserve consideration by members of that party as well as by the general public.

The first point that calls for attention is the failure to make any reasoned examination or to explain why land is falling out of cultivation, why the agricultural population is declining, why agricultural workers are badly paid and badly housed, and in short why in a country with a rich and fertile soil so few people are supported by it.

So far as we can gather his reasons from the few disconnected statements in this pamphlet Lord Addison attributes the ills of agriculture to the following causes:

- (1) That the owners of land do not provide sufficient and proper equipment, because "the bulk of the owners cannot afford the cost."
- (2) That many owner-occupiers bought their farms when land was dear with the result that "mortgages and bank overdrafts are millstones round the necks of thousands of such farmers."
- (3) That the farmer does not know what prices he will get for his produce or what he may have to pay for feeding stuffs and other supplies.
- (4) That the farmer is exploited by middlemen.
- (5) That the subdivision of land into multitudinous private ownerships handicaps the development of it. (The point of this is not explained. It appears to indicate a bias against small holdings.)
- (6) That rents are too high in some cases.

The remedies proposed are that agricultural land including farm buildings and houses should be transferred to public ownership. The payment would be made in National securities.

The purchase price would be "justly determined" so that there would be no confiscation.

The next step apparently would be to reduce rents. "A fair rent system would be established." "National ownership is the only way by which good cultivators can be freed from the crushing burden of rent."

The tenant-farmer would be given assistance "financially and otherwise to improve his land and equipment wherever necessary, as well as the provision of good drainage and water supplies."

The farmer would be given guaranteed prices for his products.

The labourer should be given a national minimum wage

which "should rise progressively as the scheme came into operation."

The distribution of agricultural produce would be undertaken or controlled by marketing boards and import boards which would eliminate unwarrantable costs of distribution.

Lastly, what about the consumer? Here Lord Addison is by no means so categorical. He complains bitterly that millions of people, especially children and mothers, do not get enough good food. He talks of fair prices for the consumer. He says that the aim of the policy is "that the multitudes who are now ill-nourished should be able to obtain the good food we can produce or can supply in abundance." He condemns the Government for "bolstering up producers' prices by inducing scarcity." All this would seem to point to a reduction in prices to the consumer, but on the other hand he says that the system aims at securing "an adequate supply of produce to the people at no greater increase in price than may be required by an efficient and well-conducted marketing scheme." (Our italics.)

Now let us come to the financial aspects of the scheme. "A National Land Account would be established into which all rents and revenues could be paid and through which the costs of development and interest services would be met." That is all that is said about the most important item in the whole project. There is no mention of the cost of the marketing and import boards. The inference, skilfully implied but not expressed, is that they will be self-supporting.

There is also no statement that the present subsidies to agriculture will be discontinued. The amount of these is placed by Lord Addison at £16 millions a year apart from agricultural de-rating. Others have placed the total including de-rating at £40 to £50 millions a year. It is not an unfair inference that Lord Addison expects these subsidies or most of them to be continued, especially as he complains that "a large proportion of these millions have never reached the farmer at all."

We are now able to form some picture of what the result will be. On the one hand the State will pay in interest upon the price "justly determined" (and leaving sinking fund out of account) something like the amount of the rent which would be payable for all agricultural land assuming that it were actually let.

On the other hand the farmer is to pay less rent than he does at present. He is also to be "freed from the stranglehold of debt" and is to have his farm better equipped and drained.

It looks as if we had already a serious deficit. But there is more to remember. The agricultural labourer is to have a progressively increasing minimum wage. The consumer, perhaps, is to have lower prices. The farmer is evidently to have a higher price for his produce. So fresh gaps appear in the financial structure of the scheme.

If subsidies are to be abolished a still greater gap is revealed, for it is all nonsense to suggest, as Lord Addison does, that the subsidies do not reach the farmers but remain in the pockets of middlemen. Most of the subsidies go direct to farmers without the intervention of middlemen. It is true, however, that they do not remain in the pockets of the farmer but are passed on eventually to the landlord. This fact is deliberately concealed by Lord Addison, because he wants to make out, first, that the landlord is so poor that he cannot equip the land which must therefore be nationalized, and, secondly, that vast sums go into the pockets of the middlemen which can be saved and so make his scheme solvent.

These points are of crucial importance. The fact

that the subsidies to agriculture mostly go in the end to the owner of land means that the "fair payment . . . to the present owners" will include the enhancement of the value of land which has arisen because of subsidies. The scheme will automatically be burdened with the cost of subsidies in perpetuity in the shape of interest on the purchase price.

There is not the slightest evidence, nor does Lord Addison attempt to produce any, that the cost of his marketing and import boards would be any less than middlemen's profits; but even if it were, the difference could not be such as to make any significant difference to the finance of the scheme.

The sum and substance of the matter is that the scheme would be from the beginning bankrupt, and it could only be saved either by large contributions from taxation or else by increasing the cost of food to the consumer.

The fundamental error is that no attack is made upon the real evil, high rents and high land values. On the contrary, in his tender regard for the vested interests of the landlords, Lord Addison fastens this burden on the backs of the community for an indefinite period.

The most serious danger, however, is that if the Labour Party were to get into power, and were to accept advice of this kind a blunder would be made whose consequences are so far reaching that it is difficult to see how they could be repaired. We can only hope that fresh consideration will be given to this matter before it is too late.

AUTUMN CONFERENCE, At Cromford Court, Matlock Bath

We renew our invitation to readers of *Land & Liberty* to attend the Week-End Conference to be held at Cromford Court, Matlock Bath, Derbyshire, on 18th and 19th September, the first session taking place on the morning of the 18th.

There is no membership fee. The Conference is convened jointly by the Henry George Foundation of Great Britain and the Henry George School of Social Science. Its objects are to discuss the educational propaganda and how to promote it by both the written and the spoken word: in particular (1) the dissemination of the literature published by the Henry George Foundation, and (2) the work of the Henry George School of Social Science. The Conference offers a special opportunity in regard to the latter for the help it will give in organizing and extending the autumn and winter study circles, and enlisting both students and instructors for them.

Cromford Court, beautifully situated in its own grounds of 24 acres, is one of the guest houses of the Friendship Holiday Association. Inclusive terms for the whole period (Friday dinner to Monday breakfast) are 22s. For part of the period (Saturday dinner to Sunday supper) the terms are 15s. As accommodation has to be booked in advance and at an early date, it is desired that all intending to come should notify accordingly without delay, enclosing 5s. part payment as booking fee, balance of payment being made at the Conference. In writing state whether Mr, Mrs or Miss, specify whether for the whole week-end or for part of it; whether as a day visitor, one or both days, not requiring bedroom accommodation, in which case there is no payment except for meals taken. Address letters to: *The Henry George Week-End Conference, 94 Petty France, London, S.W.1.* Those who think of making a longer holiday on the spot should communicate with Cromford Court direct.

NOTES AND NEWS

A documentary film, "The Spanish Earth," has been produced by Joris Ivens, a Dutchman. When a preview of it was shown to President Roosevelt his first comment on it was: "Why didn't you stress more the fact that the Spaniards are fighting not merely for the right to their own Government but for the right to bring under cultivation these great tracts of land which the old system forcibly left barren?" As a result of the President's remark the commentary is being partly re-written.—(From a report in the *News Chronicle*, 22nd July.)

Soon after the war a Japanese gentleman called upon me and asked me whether I was in favour of the League of Nations and universal disarmament. I said that I was.

"Well, then," he said, "if we were to disarm and join the League, should we be allowed to settle in California and Australia?"

"I am afraid you certainly would not."

"We should be kept out by force, as we are now."

"Yes."

"Then why should we disarm and join the League?"

I had no answer.

(Dean Inge on "The Empire Needs Puritans" in the *Evening Standard*, 30th June.)

Dr D. G. Stead, Director of Education for Chesterfield, speaking at the Summer School for the training of teachers, St Andrews, on 19th July, said that there was a general admission that it was only through a sound education that the present ills of society could be cured, and therefore an inquiry into what constituted sound education was one of fundamental importance.

If this inquiry takes place, the Henry George School of Social Science should be invited to give evidence.

The *Torquay Herald*, 13th May, reported that Primley Zoo, near Paignton, one of the largest and most valuable private zoological and botanical gardens in the world, will be closed to the public after Whit Monday. This far-reaching decision has been arrived at after very careful consideration by Mr Herbert Whitley, the owner, following a demand by the Commissioners of Inland Revenue for the payment of entertainments duty.

Macdonald, Fraser & Co., Ltd., Auctioneers, conducted the annual letting of grass parks on Dalnagairn Estate, Strathardle (Mrs Panton), and Cloquhat Estate, Bridge of Cally (Mr G. M. Forman). Competition was good, and a rise of 17 per cent on last year's rents was obtained for the Dalnagairn parks and a rise of 19 per cent for the Cloquhat parks.—*Glasgow Herald*, 14th May.

And yet some say there is "no land value" in agricultural land.

Mr George Hardie, Labour M.P. for the Springburn Division of Glasgow, died on 26th July, aged 63, at Manor House Hospital, Golders Green. He had been seriously ill for some time. He was a brother of the late Mr Keir Hardie, the first Labour M.P., and founder of the I.L.P. Elected for Springburn in 1922, he held that constituency for nine years but was defeated by a Conservative in 1931 by 34 votes, a third candidate splitting the Labour vote. He regained Springburn in 1935 by a majority of 8,427 votes. In his death the movement for Land Value Taxation has lost one of its most able, zealous and uncompromising advocates in Parliament and on the platform.