

THE LAND VALUE DUTIES COMMITTEE REACHES A DEADLOCK

A crisis has arisen in the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Land Value Duties. There has been a difference of opinion on the subjects which come within the terms of reference and is explained in the following newspaper references. The Committee has had an excellent "Press," and the controversy has aroused widespread attention. It reminds us of the statement made by Mr. Baldwin (then Financial Secretary of the Treasury) in the House of Commons, in July, 1917, that to suggest a discussion on land values was like "putting a stick into a beehive and raking out every bee in the House"—that everything that was moribund and dormant in the party spirit "would spring once more into life and take possession of us like seven devils."

A Threatened Break-up

"A. P. N.," the Lobby Correspondent of the DAILY NEWS (Liberal) writes on 20th November:—

The Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Land Valuation Duties met yesterday in private after the fortnight's adjournment, during which their chairman, Sir Thomas Whittaker, has died. The break-up of this Committee, already anticipated, is now almost a fact.

Mr. Cecil Beck was yesterday elected to the chair, and after some hesitation gave a ruling that the Committee were precluded from considering whether alternative land values duties could be substituted for the duties set up by the 1909-10 Budget. Mr. Raffan, Mr. Hartshorn, Mr. J. Wallace, and Mr. Parkinson indicated that in their view an inquiry so limited would be entirely futile, and stated that if the chairman's decision could not be modified they should feel that they could not usefully continue to be members of the Committee.

Mr. Raffan then asked permission to move that the Committee recommend the House of Commons that the terms of reference should be amended so as to give the opportunity of considering the wider question whether a direct tax on land values would be outside the scope of the inquiry.

The Chairman held that a recommendation of this character could not be made by the Committee as a whole, but individual members could take this course. Mr. Raffan then moved that the committee be adjourned for a week to allow this to be done. Major Wood suggested that it was desirable that the Committee should act together as long as possible, and proposed that the chairman should therefore himself represent to the Government the position of the Committee, and ask that an opportunity should be given for a discussion in the House of Commons on the whole question. Mr. Raffan withdrew his amendment in favour of this proposal, which was accepted.

It seems evident that in its present form the Committee cannot go on, because on the one hand, if the reference is limited, Liberal and Labour members will resign, while, on the other, Colonel Pretymann and his friends would probably resign if the scope of the inquiry were widened. The standpoint of the land values taxers is that the electors at two General Elections decided in favour of land values taxation, and that, unsatisfactory as the present duties may be, they ought not to be scrapped until every effort is exhausted to put in force the expressed views of the electors. The attitude which the Prime Minister will adopt on the question is awaited with interest.

"The End of the Owl Committee"

The MORNING POST (Conservative), of 20th November reports:—

One of the minor features of Mr. Chamberlain's Budget was the death of the land values part of the Lloyd George "People's Budget" of 1909-10, and the setting up of what was christened the Owl Committee—after the night bird who, "with my spade and trowel," dug the grave of Cock Robin. The Owl Committee has, however, dug its own grave—at all events, it is now in a state of suspended animation, the result of inter-necine strife which dates from its appointment last July. It comprised some Single Tax people, and after electing the late Sir Thomas Whittaker as Chairman it began to quarrel about the extent of its powers. It was directed by the House "to make recommendations in regard to the retention, alteration, or repeal" of the land values clauses of the "People's Budget"; to "inquire into the basis and present position" of the valuations already carried out; and to "make recommendations thereon, regard being had to the desirability of State valuations of land being available for State purposes."

When the Committee began to consider procedure the Single Tax people contended that the terms of reference would permit them to call evidence and to make recommendations in favour of their particular fad. The other members took the opposite line; and an adjournment was decided on so as to allow the Chairman to consult authority and give his decision. Sir Thomas Whittaker laid it down, after inquiry, that the Single Tax men were wrong. Then came the autumn recess, and soon after the House resumed, the sudden death of the member for Spen Valley. At another meeting Mr. Cecil Beck was chosen as Chairman, and he took the same view of the powers of the Committee as his predecessor. Yesterday the Committee met once more. The Single Taxers declared that in the circumstances they would have nothing more to do with the inquiry; the rest of the Committee was as firmly resolved to respect the ruling of the Chairman, and there was an adjournment for a week to enable their President to report to the House.

The situation is most unusual, if not without precedent. Mr. Beck will, it is expected, make a statement to the House, after questions, in the course of a day or two. What will next happen is uncertain, but the Committee has, for all practical purposes, come to an end.

ALDERMAN DOUGLAS

We cordially congratulate our colleague and co-worker on his election by the Battersea (London) Borough Council to the position of Alderman. His many friends among 'he readers of "Land & Liberty," familiar with the gifted pen of F.C.R.D. may feel assured that in this new field of civic control and administration he will work as steadfastly for the advancement of our practical policy. He will bring to bear on his new duties the cool calm judgment of one who is out to overcome difficulties and who knows how to be just to friend and foe alike.

The STAR (London), October 27th, reports correspondence relative to a rise in rent of a City office from £135 to £550.