

# THE LAND VALUES GROUP IN PARLIAMENT

## PROPOSALS MADE TO THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER

The Group speaks for 221 Members Personally Pledged to the Taxation of Land Values

A Joint Deputation of Members of Parliament, representing both Labour and Liberal Parties, met the Right Hon. Philip Snowden, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in the House of Commons, on 26th March, to urge that the forthcoming Budget contain provisions for a Tax on Land Values, the making of an up-to-date valuation of the land ascertaining the market value of land apart from improvements, and the re-equipping of the Land Valuation Department for that purpose.

Mr. P. Wilson Raffan (Lib.), the Chairman of the Land Values Group (to which 221 Members are attached), headed the Deputation and was accompanied by the following Members:—

*Labour.*—Charles Dukes, Geo. D. Hardie, Miss Jewson, Mardy Jones, T. Johnston, Albert Law, J. Mills, John Potts, R. Richardson, J. Sexton, T. W. Stamford, and Wm. Whiteley.

*Liberal.*—A. S. Comyns-Carr, J. E. Emlyn-Jones, J. Falconer, L. B. Franklin, Right Hon. C. F. G. Masterman, W. M. R. Pringle, T. Atholl Robertson, E. D. Simon, H. H. Spencer, and H. Stranger.

The Deputation which had been appointed on 18th March by a largely attended meeting of members of both parties was limited in numbers at the express request of the Chancellor.

A Memorandum was presented, the text of which will be found on our front page.

### THE INTERVIEW WITH THE CHANCELLOR

Mr. Raffan, introducing the Deputation, said they approached the Chancellor with high hopes, because so far from proposing any raid on the Treasury, they were suggesting a new and additional source of revenue. It was impossible, in view of the state of the valuation, to make any computation as to the value of the land in this country, but so far as the experiences of other countries less wealthy and less industrially developed were concerned, the value of land apart from improvements had worked out at not less than £100 per head of population. Therefore, a small levy, such as 1d. in the £ on the capital value of land, would secure a substantial contribution to the exchequer.

With reference to the justice of the proposal, that had never been better expressed than in a speech which Mr. Snowden made in the House of Commons last year when he said that "the whole economic value of land belongs to the community and no individual has the right to appropriate and enjoy what belongs to the community as a whole." They made an appeal to him for an act of real statesmanship to make a beginning with the necessary legislation, and they promised that if, as they suggested, he undertook it, they would give him all the support in their power.

Mr. Charles Dukes said that he desired to supplement the statement as made by Mr. Raffan. Having read the speeches of prominent Members of the Government from the Prime Minister downwards, all of whom were committed to the principle of the Taxation of Land Values, he felt very largely that he was forcing an open door. There was no point of difference so far as principle was concerned. Mr. Snowden would doubtless bear in mind that all schemes of public improvement, laying out of roads, housing schemes, and other proposals for dealing with employment, revealed that the spending of public money diverted those values which should accrue to the community into the pockets of the landowners.

It was understood that there was no likelihood of getting our proposals through the House other than by the means of a Finance Bill. It was for this reason that they had approached the Chancellor with a view to persuading him to make the necessary provision in the forthcoming Budget.

There was considerable support on the Labour Benches for their proposals and in fact the vast majority held the opinion that the matter was so urgent that they believed it to be of first rate importance to conserve for the community those values which otherwise would accrue to private landlords if these safeguards were not provided.

Mr. A. S. Comyns-Carr urged that the difficulties which had led to such large inroads on Parliamentary time in the debates on the 1909-10 Budget could not operate with regard to the simple proposals which were now made. Powers were now on the Statute Book sufficient to authorise the valuation, although it would be necessary to restore the clause which had unfortunately been deleted last year, but no great change would be necessary which could not be dealt with in one single operative clause. This would provide no great opportunity for amendments or obstructive opposition and it was therefore reasonable to suppose that the measure could be carried through without any undue encroachment upon the time at the disposal of the Government. Simplicity, both in drafting and in the practical work of valuation, could be achieved by a direct definition of land value, avoiding the necessity of valuing improvements and of arriving at a number of separate figures to be deducted from one another. He stressed the importance of dealing with the matter in the coming financial year. A national valuation was obviously the best and easiest means by which also the Rating of Land Values could be carried into effect, and this was a measure of the utmost importance in view of the present housing difficulties. Both the Liberal and Labour Parties were pledged to this reform and he believed that the Chancellor of the Exchequer could rely upon the enthusiastic support of the vast majority in both Parties for carrying such a measure through.

### MR. SNOWDEN'S REPLY

Mr. Snowden said he agreed that the Deputation was entirely unique in this respect that so far from seeking to make a raid on the Treasury, it came to him with suggestions which would ultimately result in a large increase of revenue. He was in general accord with the aims of the Deputation, and he adhered without qualification to the statement which he made last year that it was desirable to obtain for the public the enormous social economic value of land. He was in agreement as to the theory, the justice and the necessity of the Taxation and Rating of Land Values. The Deputation had reminded him of promises made by the Prime Minister. He was pledged individually, and the Labour Party was pledged as a Party to deal with the matter at the first available opportunity. The subject, therefore, resolved itself into one of practicability and immediate practicability. He was afraid it would be too sanguine a view to expect that any measure of this kind could be carried through the House of Commons without a long and acrimonious discussion. They could no doubt benefit by the experience which had been gained in the discussion on Mr. Lloyd George's Budget. The duties then imposed were such as to cause the maximum of opposition, and he was afraid that they only produced the minimum of benefit. He appreciated the suggestions of the Deputation that they should now proceed on new and much simpler lines. Notwithstanding this, opposition

would be aroused by any proposals which were construed as affecting adversely the landed interests who had been so deeply entrenched for so many generations. In these circumstances they would understand his difficulty in making any promise with regard to the forthcoming Budget, but he assured them that the arguments which they had placed before him would receive his earnest and most sympathetic consideration.

The Right Hon. C. F. G. Masterman expressed the thanks of the Deputation to Mr. Snowden and repeated the assurances which had been given that he would receive support from all progressive sections in the House of Commons in any proposals for the Taxation of Land Values which he was able to introduce in the forthcoming Budget. They would be prepared to spend nights as well as days in assisting him to press the measure forward, and would not care in the slightest to whom the credit was given so long as the object which they desired was achieved.

### PRELIMINARY MEETINGS OF THE LAND VALUES GROUP

Members of Parliament interested in the Taxation and Rating of Land Values were called to a general meeting in the House of Commons on 12th March by a letter jointly signed by four Labour and four Liberal members, namely: (*Labour*): Dr. Somerville Hastings, James Sexton, T. W. Stamford, and L. MacNeill Weir. (*Liberal*): A. S. Comyns-Carr, J. E. Emlyn Jones, P. Wilson Raffan and T. Atholl Robertson.

At this meeting Mr. Raffan, M.P., was elected Chairman. Messrs. T. Atholl Robertson, M.P., and Wm. Whiteley, M.P., were appointed Hon. Secretaries; and Mr. A. W. Madsen, Assistant Secretary. Mr. Raffan explained how in previous Parliaments the Labour and Liberal Members specially interested in the Taxation of Land Values had got together to make use of every opportunity to advance the reform and to discuss the legislative proposals bearing on the subject that were before the House from time to time. Their immediate object now was to urge upon the Government the case for a Tax on Land Values in the forthcoming Budget and to emphasise the importance of an up-to-date Valuation of the Land, the Valuation Department being re-equipped for that purpose.

The meeting decided to ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to receive a Deputation and a sub-committee, consisting of the Chairman, the Hon. Secretaries and Messrs. Charles Dukes, M.P., A. S. Comyns-Carr, M.P., and Mr. A. W. Madsen was appointed to prepare a Memorandum setting forth the views of the Members represented.

A further meeting, Mr. Raffan again presiding, took place on 18th March. It was reported that the Chancellor was willing to receive a Deputation which should preferably be limited to 18 in number, so that the meeting could be held in his own room in the House of Commons. This was accordingly agreed and the Memorandum drafted by the sub-committee was unanimously approved.

Members who were present at one or both of the meetings on 12th and 18th March included: (*Labour*) Charles Dukes, Geo. D. Hardie, Dr. Somerville Hastings, Miss D. Jewson, Albert Law, T. Lowth, John Potts, W. R. Raynes, R. Richardson, James Sexton, Geo. A. Spencer, T. W. Stamford, Wm. Whiteley and R. J. Wilson; (*Liberals*) T. R. Ackroyd, A. S. Comyns-Carr, C. W. Darbishire, J. E. Emlyn-Jones, J. Falconer, L. B. Franklin, Sir R. Hamilton, T. Edmund Harvey, T. Keens, F. J. Laverack, F. C. Linfield, E. Macfadyen, H. Madan, C. F. G. Masterman, W. M. R. Pringle, P. Wilson Raffan, Athelstan Rendall, T. Atholl Robertson, Harold Stranger, Joseph Sunlight, J. L. Tattersall, P. Gilchrist Thompson, Sir Harry Webb and H. W. Willison. Apologies were intimated from:

(*Labour*) Tom Johnston, Neil McLean, G. Middleton, Wm. Westwood and Wm. Wright; (*Liberals*) R. Alstead, N. Birkett, Major Hore-Belisha and Hon. J. M. Kenworthy.

### A PETITION TO THE CHANCELLOR

At the second meeting, on 18th March, Mr. Geo. D. Hardie handed in a signed Petition to the Chancellor to be conveyed to him by the Deputation. This Petition had been got together on the spur of the moment and is in the following terms:—

“We the undersigned Members of Parliament, respectfully urge upon the Government the desirability of including a Tax on Land Values in the forthcoming Budget.”

This auxiliary and spontaneous request came from a group of Labour members, namely: F. H. Broad, Wm. Bromfield, A. B. Clarke, W. S. Cluse, T. Dickson, B. Edwards, B. Gardner, F. Gould, Geo. D. Hardie, T. Henderson, R. F. Jackson, Albert Law, W. Mackinder, S. March, W. R. Raynes, Jas. Sexton, R. Spence, J. E. Sutton, E. Thurtle, W. M. Watson, J. Westwood, D. Williams, J. H. Williams, and W. Windsor.

### PERSONAL PLEDGES FROM 221 MEMBERS

We have named above altogether 67 Members (39 Labour and 28 Liberals) who are thus directly associated in the interview with the Chancellor. They represent the far greater number who have been mentioned in the last three issues of LAND & LIBERTY as having given personal assurances of support for the Taxation of Land Values. To these latter must now be added: (*Labour*) G. Edwards, F. Gould, Miss D. Jewson, W. Mackinder, J. E. Sutton, E. Thurtle, J. H. Williams and W. Windsor; (*Liberals*) N. Birkett, Athelstan Rendall, Harold Stranger, and J. L. Tattersall. With these additions, the Members of Parliament specially interested in the Taxation of Land Values now comprise 221, being 150 Labour Members and 71 Liberal Members. That is the “Land Values Group” in behalf of which the Deputation has represented to the Chancellor of the Exchequer the urgency of including a Tax on Land Values in his Budget for 1924.

### A FURTHER DECLARATION BY THE PRIME MINISTER

(At Question Time in the House of Commons on 19th March.)

Mr. Emlyn-Jones asked the Prime Minister whether his attention has been called to the statement, made at Portsmouth on 16th March by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, that the land question was at the root of unemployment and that the land monopoly must be broken by the taxation of land values; whether this is the policy of His Majesty's Government; and, if so, whether immediate steps will be taken to deal with the land problem upon the lines indicated?

The Prime Minister: The statement referred to is in harmony with the declared views of the Members of the Government on this subject. The matter is not escaping the attention of the Government, but, as the hon. Member knows, items in a programme have to be taken in a progression and not in a block.

Mr. Pringle: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that this question is one of the few questions for which there is an absolute majority in this House, and that the Government, therefore, might be able to make progress with it?

The Prime Minister: Exactly! That is what I meant by my answer.

Mr. James Hope: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the amount of Parliamentary time consumed on this question in 1909?

The Prime Minister: I also had that in view in my answer.