

Reply to Sir Charles Starmer

[Sir Charles Starmer has chosen to treat our remarks as an attack on the Independent Liberals in the House of Commons and on the Liberal Party in general. Nothing we have said either recently or at any time will bear that implication. Sir Charles refers to "this and other attacks" on the Liberal Party. He is asked to name and quote them before it is incumbent on us to answer any such accusation.

We fail to understand our correspondent's regrets as to the kind of the support we give our movement. It is a misuse of terms to say we are departing from "non-political lines." The movement is in politics and it must have either encouragement or hostility from the politicians. Considering the support this Journal gave consistently and continuously to the Liberal Party, as the party which had made our policy part of its policy, and had the declared intention to carry it through, it is idle to talk of the departure from an attitude that never existed. As a fact, during the years in which we patiently relied on the good faith of Liberal declarations, we had repeated protests that we were not merely a political, but also a party magazine.

Sir Charles Starmer misses the whole point of our criticism by confusing Liberal Leaders, the Liberal Party and Liberal principles. As a Liberal and as a supporter of the Taxation of Land Values, he fails to face the matter at issue. The rank and file of the Liberal Party are honeycombed with men and women who stand by our policy, who have fought to have it placed in the forefront of their political programmes, whose enthusiasm for it has never waned. In the same way the question finds an ever increasing support in the Labour Party; and, to a degree, it has its friends in the Tory Party as well.

Our case is that the leaders and managers of the Liberal Party have played with the Taxation of Land Values for twenty years or more, exploiting the sentiment only to set it aside with postponements, make-beliefs, make-shifts and excuses. It is for them to give a reckoning of their stewardship to their followers. The leaders have been false to distinct pledges, signed and countersigned in numberless election addresses and speeches at meetings—all affirming that the Liberal Party (so Liberal workers thought and preached) was out to rescue industry from monopoly by the Taxation of Land Values. The story has been told time and again, and we need not repeat it here.

Sir Donald Maclean is the present leader of the Party in the House of Commons. Months have been spent in discussing housing, land settlement and land acquisition, yet never once has he used his responsible position to state inside Parliament or outside that he would tackle the land problem by the Taxation of Land Values. He could not have had a better opportunity to speak from his heart on the abuses and anomalies of the present rating system. He has preferred to remain silent. He has ventured no further than to embody Liberal professions in an ambiguous and evasive formula, which if it means anything, means land purchase on the basis of the Finance Act valuation.

When we quoted Sir Donald Maclean we quoted what he was reported to say. In the debate on the Report Stage of the Land Acquisition Bill (June 25th), Sir Donald moved his amendment which added these words to Clause 2, Subsection (2):—

Such valuation shall be based upon any returns and assessments made or acquiesced in by the claimant during the preceding five years.

and he said:—

I accept the open market and the willing seller and all that is proposed in my amendment is to add that the basis upon

which the valuation must now proceed shall be upon any returns—it may be upon the latest return made for the purposes of probate.

Will Sir Charles Starmer note the words "*any returns*" and mark the confusion they introduce? Land is assessed for taxation under various heads; (a) for rates; (b) for Income Tax Schedule A; (c) for purposes of the Finance (1909-10) Act, 1910; (d) for death duty; and for other purposes. In these circumstances, and in view of Sir Donald's definite statement, was there anything "unaccountable" in our assertion that Sir Donald Maclean showed no sympathy for rateable value as the basis of purchase, and that he failed to challenge any other assessment or valuation as the basis of the landowner's price? Let us give an example by way of illustration. At Ebbw Vale negotiations took place for the purchase of 56½ acres for a housing scheme. The rateable value was £56 and on that basis £1,120 would have been a perfectly fair purchase price. The district valuer, belonging to the Finance Act Valuation Department, reported that the value of the land was £7,300. Valued at that figure under the Finance Act, what would its price be according to Sir Donald Maclean's formula? Where is there any sympathy shown for *rateable value as the basis*?

The proposal made for appointing the Commissioners of Inland Revenue as the ultimate authority for valuation under the Land Acquisition Bill would neither retard nor advance the principles for which LAND & LIBERTY stands. It only offered opportunities for debate of which very good advantage was taken as Sir Charles Starmer bears witness. We can only repeat our opinion, however, that there was nothing in it as long as the Bill gave instructions to assess compensation at the value which land would fetch if sold in the open market by a willing seller. That, too, was Sir Donald Maclean's opinion, for he had already said in the debate on the second reading:—

You may have the most independent men in the world as valuers, but they are bound by the Act and cannot do anything else.

We might point out that these words occur in the space our correspondent has himself left vacant in the second quotation he made from Sir Donald Maclean's speech on April 10th.

To return to the formula for assessing land prices on "any returns" made in the preceding three years, it was good enough, perhaps, to hang a debate on in the House of Commons. If that was its only function, and if, in spite of its faults, the responsible leader of the Liberal Party had made some case for the Taxation of Land Values, there would be little to quarrel about. But this formula did not come down to the House of Commons by accident or without forethought as to its use elsewhere. It has become the concise, complete, and *only* Liberal declaration on the land question as party policy is expounded by party managers. Consider Mr. Asquith's pronouncement, not likely to be made without careful thought:—

You will never have a fair or a workable solution of these difficulties [housing, etc.], unless and until land can be acquired for public purposes on exactly the same scale of valuation, not a penny more, at which it is assessed for public burdens.

That is the nearest approach to the relation between taxable value and purchase price that Mr. Asquith has been able to make these many months, until last month, when he maintained complete silence on the subject in face of a mass meeting of London Liberals. He could only give them the negation that Liberals were opposed to any taxation which was confiscatory in character or in object.

The formula once more appeared, as the only statement on land policy, in a joint programme issued on behalf of the Independent and the Coalition Liberals in the House of Commons. Others may interpret it as a proposition to tax land values with all that the Taxation of Land Values implies. We refuse to be so blind. It is a formula for land purchase which trades on sentiment in favour of something very different. We await a declaration from Mr. Asquith, from Sir Donald Maclean or any front bench Liberal, which will save us the trouble of reading oracles—which will affirm, without equivocation, that the Party stands for Taxation and Rating of Land Values. Let them, if they like, turn their formula inside out and say that "the value for taxation and for rating shall be exactly on the same scale, not a penny less, as the market value of the land." Then we shall know where we are, what support we can give Liberal leaders, what, in fact, the original formula really meant.

If, on the other hand, the Liberal Party (which is shortly to have its Annual Session in Birmingham) is to be advised to use the Finance Act valuation as a basis of purchase instead of, as was intended, a basis of taxation and rates, what then is Sir Charles Starmer's attitude? As an advocate of the Taxation of Land Values, with faith in Liberal leaders and with a pen ready to come to their aid, he will, we hope, criticize, and his criticism will be of interest to us.

We agree that the Labour Party in the House of Commons played a feeble and reactionary part in failing to denounce the Land Acquisition Bill. To us, to Sir Charles Starmer, to all Independent Liberals, and we are sure to the Labour Party outside Parliament, it is indeed a Landlords' Endowment Bill. Let Mr. Asquith join in this chorus, as he has not yet done. He has not spoken in that sense and Sir Charles Starmer will, perhaps, allow us meantime to place him in the witness box along with the weak-kneed and accommodating Labour men, who now sit in the House of Commons.—*The writer of the NOTES in question.*

RUSHOLME (MANCHESTER) BY-ELECTION

The result of this keenly contested election is a victory for the Government candidate with a minority vote. The polling was as follows:—

J. H. Thorpe (C.)	..	..	..	9,394
R. Dunstan (Lab.)	..	..	..	6,412
W. M. R. Pringle (L.)	..	..	..	3,923
R. B. Crewdson (Nat. Party)	..	..	..	815

Conservative majority over Labour	..	2,982
" " " Liberal	..	5,471

Both the Labour and the Liberal candidate supported the Taxation of Land Values. In his address to the electors, Dr. Dunstan advocated "The Taxation of Land Values, so as to secure for communal purposes, within a reasonable time, the total value of the land."

Mr. Pringle said: "Free access to land for housing, for land settlement and for industry can only be secured by the Taxation of Land Values."

The Taxation of Land Values was the main plank in Dr. Dunstan's programme. With the support of Messrs. Wedgwood and Outhwaite, and Dr. MacDougall of the Manchester League, the campaign recalled the days of the Hanley election of 1912.

OUR GOVERNMENT AND EAST EUROPEAN LAND

Aristocrats and Landlords

(By COLONEL WEDGWOOD, M.P., in the *Glasgow Forward*, 25th October)

If you try to disentangle the British policy in the East of Europe you discover always the preservation of landlordism. Who touches private property in land is a "Bolshevik." That is the crime of "Bolshevism." The re-establishment of Czarism and monarchy is not the main object of our Foreign Office—or Lord Curzon and his catspaw, Mr. Churchill. Their real object is the preservation of a so-called civilization based on robbery.

Tchernoff, the Socialist, before the day of the Soviet Government of Russia, took the land from the great landlords and gave it to the peasants. In North Russia, where villages held land communally, the new land is mostly communal. In South Russia, where individual ownership of land by the peasants was the rule, the new land was shared among individual peasants. Denikin, K.C.B., Koltchak, and Yudenitch, either with their tongue in their cheek or knowing that the men behind them will call the tune, may deny that they wish to re-establish Czarism; but they will not even deny that the recovery of a least part of their land by the landlords is their object and the reason of their very existence.

Why the Emigres fight with British Arms.

They will never deny it seriously; the British Foreign Office will not deny it, not even to add one more to the list of "terminological inexactitudes" of which they have been guilty. If the peasants are to retain the lands of the emigré nobles, what on earth is the use of British tanks and gas and uniforms and officers. The peasants will not work for masters if they have enough land of their own to live on. The factories and concessions will not get "hands." This must be stopped at all costs. It might spread. This is Bolshevism—the terror of the sleepless nights of the capitalists and aristocrats of all the world.

How Hungarian land was taken

Look at Hungary. Before the day of the Soviet Revolution there, Michael Karolyi ruled. He, too, expropriated the landlords of Hungary. They were to be paid the pre-war value of their land. As the Austrian crown has fallen to one-tenth of its pre-war value, the landlords would have got the land value in depreciated currency—one-tenth of its value. The Act was passed to give this land to the peasants. Before it was actually put into operation Karolyi's Government fell and the Soviets ruled. All land was then declared State property; and the peasants in time overthrew that Government, accepting the Roumanians as the least of two evils.

The new Government, supported by Britain and the Roumanians, have not only wiped out the Soviet decrees: they have held up the Karolyi Land Law too. I asked a question about this, and in time the answer came from Buda Pesth. They said the Karolyi Law had not been actually put into operation, and that it would not be put into operation till it had been reconsidered by a new Parliament. There is no sign of a new Parliament; and when there is, the landlords in power are past-masters in the act of rigging the elections to that body. Landlordism is saved in Hungary. The British Foreign Office is satisfied.

In Roumania, too, we have preserved the Boyars against all Socialist and agrarian revolts. But the best and most beautiful example comes from the Baltic