

The most legitimate and damning criticism that can be aimed at this Bill, as with others that have preceded it, is not that it is lavish with public funds, that it treats effects which make an attack on causes increasingly difficult, blinding people to the real remedy; it is not that these palliatives are paltry in their application, barely touching the fringe of the housing problem. It is that step by step, Act by Act, the rights of individuals to run their own lives is subtly being taken from them. Every palliative to redistribute wealth is inevitably accompanied by restrictions on liberty. The loss of freedom of action is not always felt by those who are presumed to benefit. The State says in effect: "You don't need the right to build your own house—we will build it for you. You don't need the right to choose your own laundry—we will do your washing." And so it is with glasses, teeth, wigs, education, insurance, transport and the rest. One by one our liberties are going, regulation by regulation and Act by Act we are approaching the all powerful State.

It may be argued that we may still choose our own laundries and pay for our own doctors and dentists, but

only the well-to-do will be able to afford to pay for other people's washing as well as their own. People living in hostels are to have part of their rent paid for them by those who live in flats or houses, and those who live in converted houses are to do so at the expense of those who do not. Threats and bribes go hand in hand—it is the old formula and the necessary accompaniment is the much-abused "black market," the law-made happy hunting ground of the "artful dodger," himself as "criminal" a creature of indefensible laws.

The real solution to the housing problem is as simple as it is fundamental. Houses are built by capital and labour applied to land. Set the building sites free by collecting the rent of land whether it be used or not. Set capital free by removing all restrictions and taxes and set labour free by giving it the only real incentive—the full reward of its effort. Open the ports and let other countries send us all they can in exchange for what we can sell them. Then, only then, will it be seen that the economic forces are not blind but conform to a natural pattern which works under conditions of freedom to the good of all.

V. H. B.

## SCOTTISH LIBERALS FACE BOTH WAYS

AT the annual conference of the Scottish Liberal Party on May 14, Mr. J. C. Stewart, on behalf of the Inverness Liberal Association, moved a comprehensive resolution under the title "Remove the Barriers," confirming the manifesto on individual freedom and equal economic rights which was proclaimed by the party on March 16, 1946. The resolution declared, "That there should exist in society no privileged classes or individuals," and "That all values in land created by the community should be taken in taxation for the benefit of the community." It accordingly called for national taxation and local rating on the value of all land, the exemption of all buildings and improvements from rates, and the institution of the fullest measure of freedom of trade, irrespective of what may be the fiscal policies of other countries.

The above provisions of the resolution were carried after considerable discussion to which, in addition to Mr. Stewart, Mr. C. M. Kennedy, Captain A. R. McDougal and others made able contributions in support. By the terms of the resolution the Scottish Liberal Party agrees to place land value taxation and Free Trade at the forefront of its programme.

The report in *The Scotsman*, May 16, on the discussions concerning amendment to one part of the resolution, and a 14-point programme for Scottish Agriculture reveals the confusion which prevailed in the minds of some delegates, and possible explanations why more is not being done by the Party's officers to clear up the confusion.

Part of the resolution, as introduced, called for the immediate repeal of the Town and Country Planning Act, which Mr. Stewart characterised as "the most reactionary and wicked Act of Parliament ever put on the Statute Book." The call for its repeal, however, was rejected by a majority, in favour of an amendment "approving of the principle of the Act," but urging amendment to correct "its present disastrous effects." In the course of the discussion Captain McDougal described the Act as nationalisation in its worst form, its object being to prevent anyone except a public authority from developing land, and, to judge by the *Scotsman's* report, this was not refuted.

Another inconsistency at the conference was the introduction of a 14-point Agricultural Programme designed

to give privileges to farmers in the form of guaranteed prices and markets, subsidising agricultural electricity and transport, loans of public money at artificially low rates of interest, and special exemption from taxation; and also providing for marketing schemes which must inevitably entail compulsion. How any person outside a mental home could sincerely reconcile these proposals with the abolition of "privileged classes or individuals" it is difficult to understand. We are glad to note that an amendment to delete the section proposing "guaranteed prices and assured markets" was moved by the Aberdeen Liberal Association, and after much discussion was eventually carried by a majority of three. A telling contribution to the discussion was made by Mr. Stewart, who suggested that if it was a good scheme to give preferential loans to farmers this could as justifiably be extended to lawyers, but if this was considered too expensive he would be ready to compromise for a special loan to himself at 1 per cent., the difference to be made up by farmers!

After the amendment had been carried, however, the hierarchy of the Party raised an obstruction; and it is only too clear why they did so. Sir Archibald Sinclair, President of the Party, protested that he could not go back to his agricultural constituency and say that the Party had changed its mind since he had told the farmers it would give them guaranteed prices; and Major Adam, prospective Candidate for North Angus, had already raised a similar objection. Sir Archibald proposed to shelve the question of price guarantee by referring it to a special committee and awaiting a definite lead from the English Liberals. His proposal was accepted.

It would be difficult to point to a clearer example of sacrificing principle to vote catching and it is significant that the rank and file show more consideration for principle than the leaders. Those who cherished hopes that the Liberal Party was "different" will be disappointed.

It is encouraging to record that thanks to the gallant efforts of a consistent few the resolution on economic freedom was carried. But it is evident the Scottish Liberal Party has a long way to go before it can claim to be any more enlightened and true to the principles of liberty than its opponents.