

WHO ARE THE OPPONENTS OF SITE VALUE RATING?

THE PARLIAMENTARY Correspondent of *The Times* (18th January) stated that "when the London County Council's Bill for the rating of site values comes before the House of Commons early next month it will be strongly opposed by Conservative private members and there will be a motion for its rejection on second reading." In addition to the Federation of British Industries, whose press circular we noticed last month, *The Times* mentions as opponents of the measure the National Federation of Property Owners and the Property Owners Protection Association, Ltd.

The National Federation has expressed its views in a letter issued to the Press by its president, Lord Chesham. The Property Owners Protection Association, Ltd., which is believed to be primarily a London organization, has been devoting its main attention to circularizing individuals and companies which it believes to be property owners, with a view to enlisting their support.

Two of these circulars have come into our possession, one issued early in January and the other dated 20th January. The latter contained an invitation to a protest meeting in Winchester House, Old Broad Street, London, to be addressed by Mr Herbert Williams, M.P. for South Croydon. What the significance of selecting Mr Williams, a well-known defender of lost causes may be, we do not know. Perhaps London members fought shy of being identified with the campaign.

Apart from the invitation to the meeting there are some other matters in the circulars which deserve attention as well as some curious but significant differences in detail between them.

The second circular says that the proposals of the L.C.C. "will affect most injuriously Property Owners in the County of London." The first one says, "it will be very detrimental to the owners and lessees of all classes of buildings and land." In the interval perhaps they had discovered that many lessees would be benefited by the proposal, as well as many small property owners.

The second circular said that the Association represented "over 10,000 Property Owners in London and Greater London with aggregating property interests exceeding £500,000,000." The first one amplified this by saying "property owners of all classes . . . including many Ducal Estates, Property Companies and Public Bodies." On further consideration it may have been thought indiscreet to lay such emphasis on Ducal Estates (the reverential capital letters are the Association's), when some of them are known to be drawing colossal ground rents out of London on which not a penny of local taxation is paid. It was also no doubt wise to omit the claim to represent property owners of all classes when a little simple arithmetic demonstrates that the average property interests of the members of this Association work out at £50,000 per member. In passing one would like to enquire what kind of "public bodies" are members of the Association.

The first circular says that the Association "has already taken steps to most strenuously oppose the Bill in every possible way, regardless of cost," and the second one says that the Association "has taken, and are continuing to take, every possible step to defeat the Bill regardless of expense and it is hoped our efforts will be crowned with success." It also says that the Association "has already expended a very considerable sum of money on the opposition."

Among these activities "steps have been taken to secure the support of the Conservative Members in the House." Circulars have been sent to 20,000 property owners. The first circular said that it was "hoped to

call a Mass Demonstration Meeting in the largest Hall available." Whether Mr Williams' meeting is the fulfilment of this promise we do not know, but, if so, the promoters were no doubt wise to hold it at the venue for company meetings and not in the Albert Hall.

The Association has deposited a Petition in Parliament against the Bill. If evidence is ever tendered in favour of the petition, one can see an opportunity for some interesting cross-examination relating to the membership and the size of the interests which the Association represents.

The first circular says that the Bill would "result in a substantial diminution of annual income as well as capital value." This is, of course, an admission that the site value rate will not be passed on by the owners of land to their tenants. We may contrast what is said in this document intended for a limited circulation with the statement made by Lord Chesham in his public pronouncement on behalf of the National Federation that the rate "will, of course, ultimately have to be passed on to all occupiers in the form of increased rent." The one is intended to alarm the ordinary citizen and prejudice him against a proposal which would be of the greatest benefit to him. The other is a statement of fact, and explains why the great land owners are taking "every possible step to defeat the Bill regardless of expense."

If only the tenants and the small owner-occupiers were equally alive to their interests, there would be no doubt as to the Bill passing.

THE "CO-OPERATIVE NEWS" SAYS "END THE LAND RAMP"

IN AN editorial article, 21st January: The London County Council Bill for the Rating of Site Values will come before the House of Commons in February. It is a modest Bill, providing for the levying of a rate of 2s. in the £ on all sites in London's administrative county area. It seeks to open a badly needed new source of municipal revenue, and to move a considerable portion of London's rating burden off houses on to site values.

Behind the measure is the support of over 220 local authorities, many controlled by Conservatives. These authorities represent the community. Against the Bill is a small clique whose exploitation of community needs has reached the dimensions of public scandal. Even so, we wish there was the slightest indication from the Government that in this matter it believes the interests of the powerful few should be subordinated to those of the community.

The facts in favour of a site values tax are overwhelming. Housing and social development have been held up all over the country, or carried out at prohibitive cost.

The battle that will rage over London's Bill will be a national battle. The principle involved is people or profiteers. In such a struggle the co-operative movement has never been neutral and its sympathies are behind the Bill.

LAND-VALUE TAXATION IN PRACTICE. Survey of Legislation in many countries. By A. W. Madsen, B.Sc. 6d.

LIGHT ON THE LAND QUESTION. A Frank Inquiry into the Land-Value Policy. 6d.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH TAXATION? The Principles that should govern it. Second Edition. By Jackson H. Ralston. 1s.