

Mr. Runciman stated in reply to Mr. Outhwaite on February 12th that on the Skidby Estate before it was acquired for small holdings there were nine men fully employed and two partly employed, and that now there are fourteen fully employed and eighteen partly employed. On the East Haddon Estate there were formerly ten men employed as against thirty-five at the present time, with additional assistance at certain seasons in each case.

Mr. Wedgwood: May we take it that there is more than twice as much wealth produced on the land now than previously, and that at the same time rates have been doubled?

Mr. Runciman: I cannot say what the produce of the land was. But what we do know is that the rates on the land, apart from buildings, have been doubled, and that the amount of labour employed has been increased by at least twice.

* * *

In reply to Mr. Pretymann on the same date Mr. Lloyd George stated that on January 31st, 1913, the total number of officials in the Land Valuation Office (Great Britain) was 4,130, of whom 901 were qualified valuers, and the remainder were clerks and valuation assistants acting under qualified valuers responsible for their work. The total salaries amounted to £490,818 9s.

It is not worth making changes, and revolutions, unless it be for some great national benefit; and when this shall appear to a nation, the danger will be to those who oppose.—THOMAS PAINE.

He that would make his own liberty secure, must guard even his own enemy from oppression; for if he violates this duty, he establishes a precedent that will reach to himself.—PAINE (PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT).

NEW PAMPHLET.

The Policy of the Land Values Group in the House of Commons.

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BY

P. WILSON RAFFAN, M.P.,

At the Eighty-fourth Dinner of the National Liberal Club Political and Economic Circle.

Mr. Raffan, who is Hon. Secretary of the Land Values Group, describes the growth in Parliament of the movement for the Taxation of Land Values. He recalls the struggles over the English and Scottish Rating Bills and the Scottish Valuation Bill which led up to the Budget of 1909. The Group's practical policy of using the new Valuation on the lines laid down in their Land and Taxation Reform Memorial is fully explained.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

REPUBLISHED BY THE

United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values,

11, TOTHILL STREET, LONDON, S.W.

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DISCUSSION.

LAND NATIONALISATION SOCIETY CONFERENCE.

A conference on the public ownership of land, convened by the Land Nationalisation Society, was held in the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Street, London, on Saturday, 25th January. Over 400 delegates were present, representing 32 Liberal Associations, 22 Women's Liberal Associations, 19 I.L.P. Branches, and 73 other associations. Advocates of the Taxation of Land Values may justly regard this conference as an unintended but very sincere compliment to their labours, for it was noticeable that, whereas the delegates listened in stony silence to proposals for buying "God's bequest to mankind" from the landlords, they cheered vociferously at any mention of rating or taxing land values.

Mr. Money informed his audience that land was hardly dearer, area for area, than pocket handkerchiefs, say 2s. a square yard; yet less than a mile from where he was standing land sells at the rate of £30 or £40 a square yard. The best reply to his contentions was made at the conference itself, as delegate after delegate rose up and told the simple and unvarnished tale of the difficulty of obtaining land and its enormous price in their vicinity. Our point of view was ably stated by Mr. J. W. Graham Peace and by Mr. Marshall, as may be seen in the subjoined report.

Mr. Dickinson, M.P., who presided, in referring to the valuation of the land that was taking place, said that when we got this, we should have in the possession of public departments an accurate idea of the respective holdings of land in this country. We should then be in a position to consider what were to be the remedies of the evils which undoubtedly attended the present system of land tenure, and to devise the best means of dealing with these evils.

Coming on to the question of remedies. He did not propose the nationalisation of land as the only remedy for all these evils; he did not deny the efficacy of other remedies. He thought that it would be a lamentable thing if the policy of the Land Nationalisation Society were to be taken to be antagonistic to that of those who were advocating the taxation of land values. The two policies were not, in his opinion, in any way inconsistent.

The problem of taxation consisted in finding the fairest way of dividing the public burdens amongst the various individuals of the nation, and he thought, in common no doubt with many of those present, that land did not bear its fair burden. In these respects the taxation of land values is just, and would in no way conflict with the principle of the public ownership of land. He advocated a tax upon the site value of the land in order that the holders of ground rents should not go free from taxation as they do at the present moment. All these points were questions of justice between man and man, between holders of real property and holders of personal property, and we ought not to forget that taxation, to be fair, must tax personal property as well as real property. There were many men who owned great wealth, and who nevertheless did not own any land in this country, and therefore it was to that extent they might be said to differ from a certain section of the land taxers in so far as their proposal was not a proposal which was fair to all the community. That was the only thing, so far as he could see, that brought the policy of the L.N.S. in conflict with the policy of the taxation of land values so as to make them antagonistic instead of helpful towards each other.

Whichever way we turned, he continued, we came back to the ownership of land; that was the real basis of the whole question. "The private ownership of land, in my opinion," Mr. Dickinson said, "can only be justified by its

success, and I have come to the conclusion that whatever advantages there may be in allowing private ownership in land to exist in the country, the disadvantages which inevitably follow from it are far greater than the advantages. Private ownership, as I have pointed out to you, has failed in our great towns because it has brought this overcrowding, this disease, these slums, these difficulties, to which I have alluded. It has failed elsewhere; it is not a system. Land should become the property of the State; the inheritance of the whole people."

Mr. Aneurin Williams then read a statement of the principles and aims of the L.N.S. One of these stated that they did not stand for confiscation, either by taxing out the landlords, or by any other method. He said that their proposals were strictly equitable and reasonable, and were that public authorities, both central and local, should have wide powers to acquire land when they saw fit by fair purchase, and general power to hold land to use it for any public purpose or to let it to others who required it for their own homes or business purposes. They advocated fair purchase at the fair value. To ascertain that fair value they would take the price at which the land was valued for taxation.

Mr. Chiozza Money, M.P., rose to move the first resolution:—

"This conference of political and other organisations in and around London strongly urges that a large extension of the public ownership of land is necessary in order that central and local authorities may deal effectively with the evils arising from land with-holding and land speculation, and with the problems of housing and town planning and other improvements, and that they may secure for the public service the steadily growing increment in the value of land which arises from public expenditure and the increase in the population of urban districts."

He said the policy of the L.N.S. was one of recovery. The land should never have been allowed to pass out of national possession. Dealing with the taxation of land values, it was not proper, he continued, to aim at a good end by immoral means, and certainly he for one would not march to his desired end over the bodies of thousands of small owners or of those hundreds of thousands of people up and down the country who by the most strenuous exertions—not capitalists or big landowners—had bought a plot of land through a building society after serving year after year. He for one would never consent to penal taxation which would hit them. And, he continued, if it were moral—which it is not—it is not worth while. Why? The answer was a very important one. They had got to remember this, that even taking the current or market prices for land in this country, the greater part of this land of ours was literally as cheap as dirt. In fact, he could give an illustration to show that it was even cheaper than dirt.

Take the hard facts of life and labour. They could buy land within 20 miles of central London for £100 an acre and less. What was the sensible policy for a nation to pursue in this matter? He commended to the meeting the policy which he conceived to be sensible. It was the duty of the nation to get hold of the agricultural belts of land round the towns for town planning. We have not put space to its proper use, the speaker continued. For the purpose of housing, which was the chief concern of the great majority of our people, the question of land was a question of space and a question of life which could alone flourish under proper conditions of space. It was the policy of some of his friends whom he called land taxers that we should tax land and let control take care of itself. We say that control is the most important feature. The Henry George principle was to tax land and take the highest rent. Now who paid the highest rent? On the outskirts of a town at the present time the people who are prepared to pay the highest rent are the golf players. You

will find any amount of land being held up for playing golf. If therefore you applied the Henry George principle to land on the outskirts of towns, the rich men could afford to pay the State for golf courses more than the working men could pay. Taxation was of course a secondary matter. It had its importance only in relation to fixing a fair price for the public acquisition of land.

We already had a land valuation in progress, thanks to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. That land valuation must be improved and perfected until we had got an instrument by which we could acquire land for public purposes, at a fair and proper price—a fair price which means on the one hand that no individual should suffer, while on the other hand it secures that the public as they desire to acquire land should not be robbed.

Mr. James May, L.C.C., then dealt with the municipal aspect of the question, remarking on the heavy prices they had had to pay for land. He said they had to seek for a new source of taxation for rates. They had 12,700 acres of land in London that was lying vacant; here in a great Imperial city lying vacant—yet the County Council were going to spend about half a million sterling in clearing away slums. Why was all that land lying vacant? It was simply waiting for a rise in value, and he hoped that the Government would soon tax site values. He thought Lloyd George was going that way.

Miss Isabella Edwards, who said she had had many years' experience in the Home Counties, dealt with the rural aspect of the land question. She affirmed that the agricultural labouring class were the worst-used class, with their wages of 12s. to £1 a week. Above all, she remarked, we want to be practical. Merely to get the highest rent out of the land was not necessarily the best policy for the community. Decent housing for the mass of the people could only be had through a wide extension of the powers of land purchase.

Mr. Lithgow, L.C.C., quoted the case of the town of Devonport, belonging to practically one landowner. If the land had belonged to the local authority, the rents that now go into private pockets could be used in relief of the rates. "Instead of being presented with a bill for rates, how nice it would be," he said, "to have a cheque handed to you by the rate collector as your share of the public fund."

After Mr. Gray and Mr. Bradley had spoken the first resolution was carried with one dissident.

Mr. Lobjoit moved the second resolution, endorsing "the principles and methods of the Acquisition of Land (Public Authorities) Bill which would give a general power to public authorities to acquire land by a simple procedure and at a price in the fixing of which its value as ascertained for the purposes of taxation shall be the governing factor"; and this was seconded by Mr. Jesson of the London County Council.

Mr. J. W. Graham Peace (Hackney Liberal and Radical Association) said that he objected to the whole proceedings, and said that the whole thing was unnecessary. There was no need to purchase land; there was no virtue whatever in the ownership of land. The whole essence of the matter lay in the use of land. That could be secured by a very simple method, which had been alluded to already on that platform. It could be secured by taking for public purposes the value which attached to land solely by reason of the presence, activity, and expenditure of the community upon it, the rent which we are paying to-day for the privilege of living on the face of London. If we took this rent and used it for defraying the cost of those services which at present are being paid for out of the rates, we should not have to pay rates. The proposals of purchase were those of putting a burden on the backs of the already over-burdened ratepayers.

Now we have been encouraged to expect a great deal from the control of land, the speaker continued. What

about the improvements on the land? How were you going to control the land of London?

There was a much simpler way. Here we had a valuation now in process—it had been going on all too slowly for some little time—urge upon the Government to let us have it as quickly as possible—and then when the valuation was completed, transfer the burden of rating and taxation from buildings on to land value, and leave the rest to economic law.

Access to land was the very essence of life itself, and while he could get back all the essentials of life by other means than buying from others the right to it, he was not going to have it another way.

Mr. J. Duncan said he was opposed to confiscation, as it was dishonest.

Mr. Marshall said he did not believe in the policy of land nationalisation as a principle. The proposition of the L.N.S. was ultimately to take the value of land for the common good, to buy up land under the valuation of 1909. The value of the land was absolutely made by the people, the community as a whole. At present we took from the community that which it had produced in order to pay rates and taxes, and we did not take for the community that which the community produced. He considered from a study of PROGRESS AND POVERTY and other works that this policy of land nationalisation by purchase—although they were all at one on the result they wished to obtain—the issuing of bonds and so forth would give a bonus to the holders of land, and be a perpetual charge on the community. Why should we burden our descendants? What right had we to make them pay *in perpetuo* to the owners of land? It would be an unjust proceeding entirely.

After several more delegates had spoken the meeting terminated.

PREMIER AND THE LAND.

In reply to one of his constituents, who asked the Prime Minister for his views on the Taxation of Land Values and the Single Tax, and also inquired as to the prospects of Scottish Home Rule, Mr. Asquith has written: "As you are probably aware from answers which I have recently given in the House of Commons, the question of Land Reform is receiving the careful consideration of the Government. I regret that it is not at present possible for me to give any indication of what the policy of the Government in the matter will be, but, as I have already stated, what is known as the Single Tax will not form part of it. With regard to the last part of your letter, I can only state that the question of further measures of statutory devolution has not been lost sight of by the Government."—MORNING POST, February 21st.

THE LAND QUESTION AT THE LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE.

The DAILY CITIZEN of February 1st gives the following report of the discussion on Land Reform at the Labour Party Conference:—

Strongly worded resolutions on land reform were agreed to. The first, which was moved by Mr. J. M. Mactavish (Portsmouth Trades Council), read:—

"That this conference instructs the Parliamentary Party to introduce a Bill to empower all local authorities to—

"(1) Impose and levy for local purposes a rate on all land values, such valuation to be declared by the land-owners.

"(2) To acquire land at the valuation for rating purposes declared by the owners.

"(3) To deprive the Local Government Board of the power which it now exercises to compel local authorities to satisfy it as to the purpose for which the land is required."

The whole question, said the mover, was what was to be the Labour Party's land policy? He submitted that the only possible policy was "Tax and buy." They wanted public ownership of land, but did not want to pay the full economic value for it. They wanted to buy it as cheaply as possible. If they would only be patient enough and insist on taxing it up to 20s. in the £ they would be able to get it for the community without it costing anything.

Mr. Porter (Portsmouth), who seconded, said he was not one who believed that they were going to raise an economical heaven by the taxation of land values, but he thought they could get from that taxation all the money needed for the reforms they desired.

Mr. Fred Hughes (Birmingham L.R.C.) moved an amendment asking that the Parliamentary party should be instructed to press for legislation empowering local authorities to acquire land compulsorily at prices based upon the valuation for land taxes, and this was seconded by Mr. Locker, but the amendment was defeated, and the motion carried by an overwhelming majority.

Mr. Morgan Hopkins moved a resolution calling for a Royal Commission on Crown and common lands and manorial rights. This, he said, was a matter of great concern to the miners of Scotland and South Wales, for the land was entirely in the hands of the lords of the manors, and there was little prospect of getting relief from the Liberal members for the constituencies concerned.

The motion was carried unanimously.

SITE VALUE OF AGRICULTURAL LAND.

According to the TIMES, a meeting of the Council of the Central and Associated Chambers of Agriculture was held at the Surveyors' Institution, Westminster, on February 4th, under the chairmanship of Lord Barnard.

The Chairman pointed out the desirability both in the Council and in the local chambers and clubs of avoiding so far as possible any reference to or any influence of party politics. The value of the Chamber, he said, depended largely upon the fact that it was non-political.

Mr. Wood Homer moved the reception of a report of the Local Taxation Committee on the method of ascertaining site value of agricultural land under the Finance Act, 1909-10. Their chief contention, he said, was that the valuation now being made of agricultural land was not at its true site value, and they strongly urged that it was unjust to use the valuation for any general taxation purposes.

Mr. Royds, M.P., said that under the methods employed by the Commissioners of Inland Revenue on obtaining the site value of building land the result did more or less truly represent the unimproved and bare value of the land, whereas the site value of agricultural land as ascertained by the Commissioners included a very large proportion of the improvements not only of owners but of tenants, and was not the true site value of the land at all.

The report was received.

If we were wise enough to seek and find the causes that call for charity, there would be some hope for us.—TOM L. JOHNSON.

Land monopoly is really the parent of chattel slavery. For if no persons owned the land of others, or more land than they needed to cultivate by their own labour for their own support, they would not covet their fellow-men as slaves to work it for them.—EDWIN BURGESS (1859-60).