

Twenty-fifth Annual Report

The Executive at this Twenty-fifth Annual Meeting of the League have, even in these evil days in which all reforming organisations live, to report that the affairs of the League afford cause for satisfaction. The membership has fallen off, and the financial support also shows a tendency downward, not so much from falling off of membership as from a reduction in the amount of subscriptions. There is cause for satisfaction that the power and influence of the League to propagate the doctrines of Henry George has been, since its inception, steadily on the increase, and once things political regain something of their normal conditions our activity can be resumed. The United Committee has become the centre of the movement and tends to attract all kinds of support there. The Committee, however, supports and encourages the League in all its work. The meetings which the Executive decided to hold in the Rooms were all very successful and exceptionally well attended. These were reported in *LAND VALUES* each month. An interesting meeting was held in Reid's Tea Rooms on 22nd February at which Mr. J. Dundas White was inducted to the chair on the motion of Mr. David McLardy, seconded by Mr. McInnes. The most important meeting was the Conference held on 3rd and 4th September under the joint auspices of the League and the United Committee.

The Press propaganda has been practically at a standstill owing to the almost universal refusal of the Press to discuss the question through the medium of "Letters to the Editor." The circulation of literature has also been small. One outstanding feature of the year has been the classes conducted at Dumbarton and Alexandria by Mr. John L. Carvel. These classes have been kept going two nights each week from October, 1915, till March, 1916. They have been chiefly attended by university students employed in the munition works. Sixty-five copies of *PROGRESS AND POVERTY* have been sold and a great quantity of other literature distributed. The net result of this effort is quite a number of new recruits to the movement.

The Land Values Group have, in spite of the war, been able to do some useful work. The reports of the debates in Parliament, which *LAND VALUES* contains, show that much valuable work has been done in Parliament during the year to keep the tide of Tory reaction from overwhelming the work we have accomplished.

The report concluded with a summary of the progress made during the year in various British Colonies and abroad.

YORKSHIRE AND NORTHERN LEAGUE

71, North Street, Keighley.

On April 9th we held the last of our meetings for the session when Mr. J. W. Booth delivered a most lucid and clearly reasoned address on the subject of "Social Reform After the War." All who attended greatly enjoyed the address. Mr. Booth has a quiet, but very convincing manner, and is always particularly good in discussion. We are having many requests for literature, and considering the times we have had very good sales of books and pamphlets.

F. SKIRROW, Secretary.

UNITED COMMITTEE

During last month the following meetings were addressed by Mr. A. McLaren: Goldsmiths' University College, Southall Brotherhood, W. Hendon Branch of the Licensed Vehicle Workers' Union, Hackney Branch of the National Union of Railwaymen, and Surbiton I.L.P.

The following bodies have intimated that they have adopted our resolutions on the taxation of land values and forwarded them to the Government: Wealdstone, and Hornsey and Wood Green Branches of the National Union of Railwaymen, and Richmond I.L.P.

COLONIAL AND FOREIGN

PROGRESS IN THE TRANSVAAL

Local Rating on Land Values Adopted

An Ordinance of the Transvaal Provincial Council has just been passed and received the assent of the Union Government, compelling local authorities in the Transvaal to raise at least a part, and enabling them after two years' time to raise the whole, of the local rates from land value alone. The measure is one of the most radical that have been adopted in any part of the world.

It will be recalled that the taxation of land values has been endorsed by both the Unionist and the Labour Parties in the Transvaal, though the latter party has been much more vigorous in advocating the principle. The Labour Party secured a majority in the elections of February, 1914, and fulfilled their pledges to the electors by passing on 30th April, 1914, an Ordinance requiring local authorities to rate only on land values. The Ordinance was objected to by the Union Government because it not only compelled the local authorities to rate land values, but precluded them from rating anything else. On July 1st, 1914, the Labour Party passed an amended Ordinance, not compelling, but merely empowering the local authorities to rate land values specially. To this Ordinance also the Governor-General-in-Council refused to assent.

The Union Government has at last withdrawn its opposition and assented to an Ordinance introduced this year. The credit for all these efforts which have now been crowned with success must mainly be given to Mr. F. A. W. Lucas, the leader of the Labour Party in the Transvaal, who has always been a consistent and strenuous advocate of the taxation of land values.

The measure which has now been passed, entitled the "Local Authorities Rating Amendment Ordinance, 1916," while giving the local authorities a certain amount of discretion as to the basis of rating ensures that a substantial rate is levied on land values. "No rate shall be levied upon improvements until a rate of one penny in the pound on the [capital] site value of the land within the municipality as appearing in the valuation roll shall have been imposed." (This rate of 1d. in the £ is called the "original rate.") Any rate "which is levied in addition to the original rate shall be levied on the site value of the land." (Such a rate is called an "additional rate.") The local authority may determine "that a rate of an amount in the pound equal to or less than the additional rate shall be levied on the value of improvements." This is subject to four provisos: (1) where the rate which is levied on the value of improvements is equal to the additional rate that rate shall not exceed threepence in the pound; (2) where the rate so levied on improvements is less than the "additional rate" then the "additional rate" may be raised not higher than that rate in the pound which together with the rate on the value of improvements will produce a sum equal to the sum which would be produced by a rate of threepence in the pound on the value of land and the value of improvements taken together; (3) the additional rate shall in no case exceed sixpence in the pound; (4) until two years after the commencement of the Ordinance a rate of not less than half the additional rate shall be levied on improvements.

Within two months of the Ordinance taking effect the local authorities are to cause a revaluation to be made and any rate imposed after June 30th, 1916, is to be on the value ascertained at such revaluation. In the meantime the existing valuation roll may be taken as the basis. Site value of land is defined as "the capital sum which the land or interest in land might be expected to realise if offered

for sale on such reasonable conditions as a *bona fide* seller would require assuming that the improvements, if any, thereon or appertaining thereto made or acquired by the owner or his predecessors in title had not been made. The site value of land shall include any value due to any franchise licence privilege or concession attached to the site for the time being." The value of improvements in relation to land is defined as "the added value which the improvements give to the land at the date of valuation irrespective of the cost of the improvements."

In the case of land "bona fide and exclusively used as agricultural land" it is to be rated upon half its agricultural value. If in addition it has an excess value for any other purpose, it is to be rated on the full amount of such excess. This provision is the only notable blemish in the Ordinance and we may hope that Mr. Lucas and his colleagues will soon be successful in eliminating it.

The lessee is not liable for any rates payable in respect of the lessor's interest in the property. "Any provision in a contract existing at the date of the taking effect of this Ordinance or hereafter entered into whereby any person primarily liable for payment of any rates imposed pursuant to this Ordinance . . . seeks to render any person interested under or subsequent to himself as lessee of such rateable property . . . liable to pay such rates . . . in lieu or stead of himself shall be null and void."

It will be seen that this is a most radical and effective measure. It was strongly opposed by the great mining and land-holding companies, but was supported by the local authorities. The Johannesburg Town Council on March 7th passed by the large majority of 20 to 7 a resolution asking the Governor-General-in-Council to assent to the Ordinance.

UNITED STATES

A Bill to Relieve Unemployment has been introduced by Representative Crosser of Ohio and referred to the Committee on Public Lands. The main provisions of the Bill are to set up a National Colonisation Board, to empower this Board to select portions of the public domain for Colonies, to develop these lands and to charge the cost of development against the value of the land apart from improvements. The title to all lands retained or acquired for such Colonies shall remain in the United States Government, but the land may be leased for a term of years to private individuals.

The Bill is not in itself a very formidable attack on land monopoly, but it has served to draw attention to the land question. Mr. Frank P. Walsh, who was lately Chairman of the United States Commission on Industrial Relations, and who is now Chairman of the Committee on Industrial Relations, a propagandist body for urging the adoption of the recommendations of the Commission, has issued the following statement on the Crosser Bill:—

The Bill invokes and applies to the lands of the public domain the absolutely right doctrine that the title to land shall depend on its productive use.

The Crosser Bill is not only right in itself. It points the way that legislation should go to prevent speculation and private monopoly in natural resources. It recognises as far as it goes the inalienable right of the community to take for the welfare of all the values that the community creates; and it recognises the equality divine right of the producer and toiler to get and keep that wealth which his own labour has produced.

The most searching and widespread investigations of the United States Commission on Industrial Relations into the frightful and preventable evils of unemployment and tenant farming and the bad distribution of wealth make the following recommendations of the main or Manly report of the Commission unanswerable to all fair-minded men:—

1. The revision of the taxation system so as to exempt from taxation all improvements and tax unused land at its full rental value.

2. Vigorous and unrelenting prosecution to regain all land, water power and mineral rights secured from the Government by fraud.

3. A general revision of our land laws, so as to apply to all future land grants the doctrine of "superior use," as in the case of water rights in California, and provision for forfeiture in case of actual non-use.

We would go far toward the solution of our industrial problems if there were printed in letters of gold and hung in the Halls of Congress and in every legislative hall of our American Republic these words of Joseph Fels:—

I believe that all are violating the divine law who live in idleness on wealth produced by others, since they eat bread in the sweat of their brothers' brows.

I believe that involuntary poverty and involuntary idleness are unnatural and are due to the denial by some of the right of others to use freely the gifts of God to all.

Since labour products are needed to sustain life and since labour must be applied to land in order to produce, I believe that every child comes into life with divine permission to use land without the consent of any other child of God.

The enormous incomes and inheritances that imperil our Republic and the enormous power over others that go with these fortunes are based on the unnatural possession by a comparative few of our mines and our highways of commerce and of most of our city and of much of our richest farming lands.

The iniquitous mother of Poverty is Privilege. To abolish Poverty, Privilege must be killed. Power in the hands of the producers and toilers, through organisation and collective bargaining, is one necessary weapon with which to kill Privilege. Power in the hands of the people, through laying such burdens on Privilege that Privilege shall be abolished and be taken off of the back of labour, is the other necessary weapon for destroying it.

In the death of Sir George Green, which took place at his home at Partick, Glasgow, the Glasgow movement for the Taxation of Land Values has lost an ardent and faithful supporter. Born at Stockport in 1843, Sir George began work in a cotton mill at eight years of age. Later he found employment in the Prudential Assurance Company, and it was as Inspector for Scotland of the Company that he settled in Glasgow some 27 years ago. Three years ago, in our issue of May, 1913, we put on record a sketch of his labours as a politician, a municipal administrator and advocate of the policy we seek to promote. As a representative Liberal he claimed for the taxation of land values a foremost place in the programme of the party. He was a vice-president of the Scottish League, and though engaged in public work and busy with very many social and philanthropic agencies, he was ever ready and eager to uphold the League and to render it service. He took no part in the management of the League's affairs, and never sought in any way to interfere with, or influence its decisions. If there were gathering clouds and the outlook became not too promising, he was always at hand, eager to know how he could help. He attached considerable value to LAND VALUES, as the special missionary and messenger of the movement, and did all he could to further a knowledge of it years ago, when the journal had fewer friends than it has to-day.

The GLASGOW HERALD, in its obituary notice of Sir George, said: "He was a man of high personal character, genial in disposition, and in public and private life was held in esteem." This tribute to the man is his due from friend and foe alike. The memory of his public spirited and strenuous life will long remain an example and an encouragement to all who knew him and worked with him in the cause of humanity and social progress. We join with our colleagues in sincerest sympathy with Lieutenant Joseph Green and the members of his family in their great loss.