

## SOCIALISM AND THE LAND QUESTION

### A Criticism and some Arguments

There are at least 400 000 of an Irish population in Scotland. The vast bulk of the adult portion of that population is engaged in labouring or occupations of an artisan character, and attached to trade union societies. In the main the leaders of these organisations are Socialists, and use their trade union organisations for Socialist purposes. The gospel they preach is that ideal labour conditions will not be realised until the people secure possession of land, factories, shipping, in fact of all the instruments of production and distribution, and organise all for the benefit of the commonweal.

#### THE VIEWS OF MICHAEL DAVITT

Nationalists, however, will be interested to know the view of Michael Davitt. He regretted the tendency of British Labour leaders to rail at the power of Capital. In the *DAILY CHRONICLE* he wrote:—"No intelligent working man can give a moment's rational study to the Labour problem of these countries without discovering where the root evil of our industrial system lies. Underpaid toil, the social wretchedness associated with the labouring poor, the misery of the unemployed, and the shame and sufferings of the pauperised workers of the community are referable for cause and existence to laws which enable a small class of men to own and control the land and the mineral wealth of the United Kingdom. It is in the rent and taxes levied upon the use of these natural agencies which are the very life or our social and industrial organisms, where low wages, depression, and strikes really originate." In the *DAILY CHRONICLE* Mr. Davitt stated—"The outcry against 'capital' on the part of advanced Labour advocates tends to disguise an older and more formidable enemy of Labour and landlords not a few are astute enough to send this clamant Labour on this seductive scent in order to direct attention from a system which is in reality the parent of capitalism and all its works and pomps. The capitalist is the objective agency whereby the worker is made to surrender to profit what a just system of wealth distribution would award his labour; but the efficient cause of this underpaid sweat and toil is found in the laws which enable an idle interest to tax both capital and labour, and to dictate as well the conditions under which one or both shall prosecute the enterprise of wealth production."

#### IRISH NATIONALISTS AND LABOUR QUESTION.

Amongst those who held views akin to those expressed by the late Michael Davitt were Cardinal Manning, Bishop Nulty, and John Ferguson. Nationalists who are interested in labour questions would do well to study their views instead of running after the will-o'-the-wisp of Socialism. Disciples of the latter cult are often time-wasters. Their palliative legislative proposals, too often involve compensation to landowners or merely enable this class to extract more rent. If the vast bulk of those who stand in public life for better conditions for the workers recognised the truth underlying the statement made by Mr. Davitt, they would concentrate on the abolition of land monopoly, and by that means wages would rise to their natural level. To form a labour colony a Mr. Peel took with him to the Swan River Colony, West Australia, means of subsistence and of production to the amount of £50,000. He had the foresight to bring with him, besides, 3,000 persons of the working class—men, women, and children. "Once he arrived at his destination, Mr. Peel," says Wakefield in *ENGLAND AND AMERICA*, "was left without a servant to

make his bed or fetch him water from the river." Karl Marx, after supplying this quotation, adds—"Unhappy Mr. Peel, who provided for everything except the export of English modes of production to Swan River." It appears that Mr. Peel's colonists, on arrival in West Australia, found they could easily obtain farms, and refused to work for Mr. Peel. His capital, his money, his machinery were useless to him so long as the people found they could employ themselves at better terms than he offered. This is no solitary instance of capitalism or employers having no power where access to land is easy. The golden age of the English labourer was the Thirteenth Century, when more than one half of the land was common property, and men on that land could easily employ themselves. The result was that no one would work for an employer for less than he could get by employing himself, and wages were therefore high. The Legislature of the time passed Acts of Parliament in the effort to keep down wages, and all its efforts proved abortive until the "common lands" were enclosed, when the labourers were forced to work for a subsistence wage. The Swan River colony example, the facts of life in the "golden age of the English labourer," the fact that as land has become private property in America, Canada, and Australia, wages have tended to decrease, ought to point a moral for the increasing forces which are gathering around the Labour Party in Scotland. "Free the land from the shackles that bind it!" ought to be the rallying cry of the new crusade. Force all the idle acres into use, and so great will be the demand for workers that wages will rise to their full earnings point and the power of capitalists to make large fortunes will be destroyed.—*The Irish Weekly ( Belfast ), February 16th.*

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