

LAND & LIBERTY

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Here are two simple principles, both of which are self-evident:

I.—That all men have equal rights to the use and enjoyment of the elements provided by Nature.

II.—That each man has an exclusive right to the use and enjoyment of what is produced by his own labour.

There is no conflict between these principles. On the contrary, they are correlative. To secure fully the individual right of property in the produce of labour, we must treat the elements of Nature as common property.—*Henry George: "Protection or Free Trade,"* chapter 26,

AFTER THE WAR

It is a plausible argument that the industrial conditions which are seen in unemployment and high cost of living are the inevitable results of the material losses and the disorganisation caused by five years of war. It will not be so easy to show why, in spite of the war, its destruction and its sacrifices, there are evidences of abundant wealth which some are able to enjoy while others go short. A catastrophe has overwhelmed us, but it has not caused each and all to suffer equally.

The explanation will not square with the facts. It is an attempt to revive the wage-fund theory which has served its day and time in falsifying the truth by "proving" to working people that wages tend naturally to a minimum and that nothing could stop that movement but a diminution in their numbers or an increase in the amount of capital devoted to their employment. That doctrine was demolished long ago, and the economists of the schools and universities, when challenged with it, protest it has been abandoned, although they seldom notice the author who so effectively exposed it. But here it is, as fresh as ever, welcomed back from the grave and doing duty once more to justify poverty in the special circumstances of the moment. How often have we not heard that the war has devoured the accumulations of the past, that the nation has lived on its capital or spent its earnings and must bear the consequences in a long period of self-denial and hardship? This says in so many words that the destruction of capital is the destruction of the fund out of which wages are paid and unemployment follows as the night follows the day.

The dreary reports of the Reconstruction Committees, appointed in scores to tell us how normal business and trade may be resumed, have familiarized us with this view of the case. They are haunted by the loss of "savings," the disaster it has involved, the burden it

has imposed on the community. But they are never able to say what these savings were or where they went. They cannot maintain that the war consumed stored wealth which must now be replaced. If the cost of the war had depended on any such accumulations, it could not have lasted a couple of weeks.

Nor is it true under any circumstances that human society depends on past accumulations or that savings are consumed in its support. Henry George, in his examination of the wage-fund theory, gives this illustration:—

Here is a luxurious idler, who does no productive work either with head or hand, but lives, we say, upon wealth which his father left him securely invested in Government bonds. Does his subsistence, as a matter of fact, come from wealth accumulated in the past or from the productive work that is going on around him? On his table are new-laid eggs, butter churned but a few days before, milk which the cow gave this morning, fish which twenty-four hours ago were swimming in the sea, meat which the butcher boy has just brought in time to be cooked, vegetables fresh from the garden, and fruit from the orchard—in short, hardly anything that has not recently left the hand of the productive labourer. . . . What this man inherited from his father, and on which we say he lives, is not actually wealth at all, but only the power of commanding wealth as other's produce it. And it is from this contemporaneous production that his subsistence is drawn.—(*PROGRESS AND POVERTY*, Book 1, Chap. IV.)

What is true of the individual is true also of the whole community. It lives "from hand to mouth." It lives on and is enriched by current industry. That being so, the fact that some enjoy plenty while others must go short has nothing to do with consumption or destruction in the past. That being so, the fact that there is unemployment and scarcity (for the "high cost of living" means nothing else, and the money price of things does not belong to the question) must find explanation in some other cause than the alleged want of capital. In the one case, there is spoliation; a mortgage on production which takes wealth from some and gives it to others without a corresponding return. The non-producers and the "profiteers" are fed while the producers are robbed. In the other case, artificial obstacles are preventing access to the great store-house of nature from which mankind can obtain immediately and in abundance all that is required for his sustenance.

It is the fashion to deal with these matters as if they were problems needing expert inquiry for their solution and calling in all the powers of the State and Trade Union action to force them into another shape. Unfortunately, the wage fund theory is written large over the social questions of the day by more than those who put it forward as a ready excuse for poverty. The idea that the sum to be distributed in wages is a fixed one was the motive in the great strikes in the beginning of the year, which vainly aimed at an increase of employment by a reduction of hours. The leaders of the Labour movement forced the pace for this experiment, and it failed as it was bound to do. The aims and aspirations were right, but the methods were wrong. The reduction of the hours of labour is worth fighting for, but this desideratum will only be achieved when the opportunities to employment are no longer held as a close monopoly.

Problems, difficulties and strife have been created out of what is, after all, a simple question of elemental justice and of neglect or contempt of the natural rights

of man—the rights of the people to the land, and the right of the producer to what he produces, all customs, laws and institutions notwithstanding.—A. W. M.

HOUSING DELAYS

In opening his housing campaign at Nottingham on Monday, Dr. Addison expressed disappointment at the slow rate of progress being made in some cases. He pointed out to the representatives present from the counties of Nottingham, Leicester, Derby, Rutland, and Lincoln, which form a single region for housing purposes, that while there were 148 local authorities in the area, up to that date the Local Government Board had received proposals of one kind and another from only 44 of them. This is certainly a small proportion, and it is to be hoped that greater activity will soon prevail in the district. At the same time it is only fair to remark that while in this case the delay appears to be due largely to the local authorities themselves, this is not by any means always the case.

Sometimes there is serious and undue departmental delay, and in many other cases progress is still being held up by the demands of landowners for excessive prices for land for housing purposes. Against these delays a strong protest has been made recently on behalf of the Town Council of St. Helens. It was pointed out that the council had been engaged from February last right up to the present time in efforts to secure land, to obtain the district valuer's estimate of its value, and to get the sanction of the L.G.B. to a loan for its purchase. In this case it appears that the local authority has at least as much cause for complaint and disappointment as the L.G.B. itself may have in some other instances.

On this point we are aware that the L.G.B., in a white paper issued recently, expressed the view that the maximum time that should elapse between the approval of housing plans by the Board and the submission of a provisionally accepted tender for building should not be more than five weeks. If this could be adhered to it would undoubtedly remove any ground for complaint, but against this statement must be placed that of the Chairman of the Public Health Committee of the City of Manchester, who states that he has calculated that, according to the procedure laid down by the L.G.B. itself, it would take nine months to carry through a building scheme from its initiation to the stage of getting contracts for the erection of the houses. There is a good deal of discrepancy between five weeks and nine months, and most of those who have had experience of Government Departments will be inclined to think that the longer period is likely to be nearer the mark in many cases.

As already stated, one of the chief difficulties in the way of prompt action arises from trouble about the acquisition of land and the question of price. Referring to this question and the work of the district valuers in connection therewith, Dr. Addison mentioned thirteen schemes in which the landowners asked £56,000 for land valued by the district valuers at only £35,000. Eventually this land was secured for £38,000—a considerable reduction on the exorbitant amount originally demanded. But this reveals a fruitful source of delay tending to prevent that prompt action which everyone now desires to see taken.—From the "Municipal Journal," June 20th.

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COAL MINES AND THE STATE

Taxation of Land Values the Solution

(Extract from address delivered by Colonel H. S. Murray, Chairman of Stanley Bros., Ltd., at the general meeting of that company in Nuneaton, on June 25th.—BIRMINGHAM POST Report.)

I am sure you will consider the balance sheet very satisfactory so far as the figures go, and that it more than justifies the payment of the proposed dividend. It would not have been so satisfactory by a good deal had we not received the contribution of the Coal Controller, but, of course, on the other hand, the trade would not have been controlled, and we should have been masters in our own house. I don't know what the future has in store for us, but it seems to me the present method of making up profits to the losing collieries engaged in the home trade, by taking the surplus profits from collieries engaged in export trade, where they are allowed to charge much higher prices for coal, is a rotten system.

You will, no doubt, have been following the extraordinary pantomime just closed in London called a Commission on the Coal Industry. The late Lord Beaconsfield once defined a Royal Commission as "a roundabout means of finding out what everybody knows already," but this Commission has not confirmed any previous knowledge, and has made confusion worse confounded. The public have been bewildered by the most contradictory evidence dictated by prejudice and partisanship. It was stated in the interim report issued by Justice Sankey and three other members of the Commission that "even upon the evidence already given the present system of ownership and working in the coal industry stands condemned." Now it is difficult to see how such a statement can be justified, unless, indeed, we condemn every other industry in the country as well. It is easy to find fault with any industry, and the whole industrial system, indeed the whole social system, stands equally condemned on such a basis. There is waste and extravagance in the cotton, in the woollen industries, and these terms may be equally applied, together with that of gross inefficiency, to the great industry of agriculture. But whatever criticism may be applied to these main industries, an industry carried on by Government, in respect of waste, extravagance, and inefficiency, is the abomination of all. It would, no doubt, suit some of us very well to have our mines nationalised, and get out of worry and responsibility at a fair price from the Government, especially those who have only undertakings of average merit. Indeed, I have found mine owners enthusiastically in favour of it, but I did not fail to notice at once that they had either indifferent or losing businesses. For the country it would be ruinous.

Mr. Smillie was able to show up the iniquity of the royalty system, whereby large sums are paid to men who take no part in supplying the country with coal, and who merely levy tribute on what rightfully should belong to the community. To abolish royalties, however, would not help to increase the output of coal, or improve the mining industry. Undoubtedly royalties should be paid to the right people, namely, the community, and that can be done by taxation, not necessarily by nationalisation. . . .

The present control, which the war may have rendered temporarily necessary, should gradually be abolished, and the industry be carried on in freedom as formerly. After that, the remedy is one of taxation, not nationalisation, with its waste, mismanagement, and corruption. The mines should be taxed on their site value, and in proportion to the value of the deposits of coal. This means the nationalisation of coal, not the nationalisation