

"OUR POLICY."

"We would simply take for the community what belongs to the community—the value that attaches to land by the growth of the community; leave sacredly to the individual all that belongs to the individual."—*Henry George.*

THE COMING LAND POLICY.

Announcements in the Press during December give good ground for the expectation that Mr. Lloyd George will commence his much discussed land reform campaign at Swindon, and probably on the 14th January, when he will no doubt put further speculation at rest by explaining definitely the proposals which he, as a Minister of the Crown and a representative spokesman of the Liberal Party, wishes to place before the country. Up to the present he has shown no indication as to the means he thinks should be adopted for dealing with the land question. There has been nothing but a general indictment of landlordism framed in broad general terms, but enough has been said to inspire hope among the people of great changes in their conditions of life and labour, and cause genuine alarm among those whose privileges are built on an unjust system of land tenure. Public interest has been maintained by the prominence given to Mr. Lloyd George's informal Land Inquiry Committee, charged with the duty of collecting information, and to the activity of their band of investigators, armed with a prodigious "questionnaire," which has provoked the resentment of many of the "10,000 little Tsars" on whose estates inquiries have been made into housing, overcrowding, and other conditions. Mr. Lloyd George's latest and most significant speech was that delivered in Aberdeen on the 20th November at the Annual Meeting of the Scottish Liberal Association. He said:—

The first essential condition to every social reform, every real improvement in the lot of the people, is a thorough, complete change in our land system. Search out every problem, look into these questions thoroughly, and the more thoroughly you look into them you will find that the land is at the root of most of them. Housing, wages, food, health, the development of a virile, independent, manly, Imperial race—you must have a free land system as an essential condition of these. To use a gardening phrase, our social and economic condition is now bound by the feudal system; it has no room to develop; its roots are breaking through. Well, let's burst it. . . . You want the people on the land, and they have been driven off, driven by the difficulties of obtaining access to it, by that difficulty of obtaining sites for houses on it, by sport, by conditions that make it impossible to develop the resources of the land to its full capacity. All these things are preventing the people of this country from making the best use of the soil which, after all, is the basis of all real prosperity in every country.

It is an emphatic statement, but what does it lead to and what remedies are to be proposed? Mr. Lloyd George has on previous occasions denounced the feudal system, and it is difficult to understand his meaning,

for the last vestiges of the feudal system of landholding have long since disappeared, and with them the obligations placed upon landholders to render services in return for the privileges granted to them as tenants of the Crown. Feudal tenure has given place to unrestricted ownership with power to hold land as private property exempt from obligations, and with the right to enjoy privileges without paying for them. It is not any "feudal system" which denies access to land or imposes conditions against the best use of land. It is the more modern system under which taxation has been transferred from the shoulders of the landholder to the shoulders of the land-user, penalising every activity, encouraging the withholding of land, safeguarding the landowner in his power to prevent land from being used except on his terms, and cheating the community out of the rent of land which it creates. In the growth and development of modern landlordism the people have become landless in the sense that they must pay others for their birthright. That fundamental injustice, which never was a characteristic of feudal tenure, is reflected in the hard conditions Mr. Lloyd George is determined to see altered, and the remedy, to re-establish the rights of all to use the land, is obvious. There can be no thorough and complete change in our land system unless it is based upon that principle and is directed toward that goal.

Fortunately the appreciation of the principle of equal rights is making headway, although there are many who ignore it entirely, and in the name of Liberalism try to make a brave display with land purchase or small ownership, or a State grant for cottages to raise the price of land, paid from the proceeds of the taxation that causes poverty and prevents house building, or a "minimum wage" legislation, instead of the freedom to make Mother Earth pay her maximum wage, or so-called "fair rent" courts that will legalise the landowner's idle partnership and neither free the land nor liberate the people. These are the makeshifts of the men who, to apply Mr. Lloyd George's own language at Swansea on the 28th May, are afraid of principle and deal with the land question as if they were handling a hedgehog.

Some of these policies are already ruled out of the Liberal programme by Mr. Asquith himself, who said at Ladybank that the solution would not be found in what was called land nationalisation, nor in anything more than a very partial attempt at solution in the artificial creation upon a large scale of private ownership. For the rest, neither State cottage building, nor minimum wage legislation, nor fair rent courts, offer the drastic changes Mr. Lloyd George demands, nor can they conceivably open up access to land or provide the sites for cottages, or remove the conditions which prevent land from being put to its best use. These things can only be done by effecting a "thorough, complete change" in taxation as applied to landowners and land users.

The ownership of land consists in the right to appropriate a communal value, the value that attaches to land because of its advantage of position or its inherent qualities, and not only would the equal right to land be established by placing taxation upon the market value of land, but access to land would be secured and conditions would be set up in which all land would be put to its best use. Two forces would operate, not in opposite directions but in the same direction, for he who owned land would be compelled by the pressure of the tax to use the land or allow others to do so, and he who used land would be encouraged to build and improve by having to pay no more rates or taxes on that account. And so, with greater opportunities made available to all for the production of wealth, wages would rise naturally, and "houses, food and health" would be problems easily settled by every individual for himself. This is the policy which alone holds the field. It is embodied in the Land and Taxation Reform Memorial, officially adopted by the Liberal party itself, and setting forth nothing to which the party has not been committed by the plain declarations of its most representative members.

Swindon has been well chosen for the statement of the new land policy. The neighbourhood for miles around has been well cultivated for an enthusiastic welcome to proposals to rate and tax land values. Ten thousand signatures have been appended to a petition from residents in Wiltshire to Mr. Lloyd George in the following terms:—

TO THE CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER.

The Petition of the undersigned adult residents of Wiltshire respectfully sheweth:—

(1) That the condition of those who labour upon the soil of Wiltshire stands in urgent need of improvement. The wage of the agricultural labourer is a miserable pittance. His cottage is often a damp and dismal abode, and even such is hard to obtain. Nor has the labourer a chance to rise by obtaining land on reasonable terms. These conditions are the result of the land being monopolised and withheld from full use; the Landowners' Return of 1873 showed that 44 proprietors held 465,601 acres, or over half the county.

(2) That in the towns of Wiltshire wages are low as the result of the people being driven from the villages to compete for work in such centres; the Census of 1901 showed that during the previous ten years 22,000 people had migrated from the rural districts of the county.

(3) That the rates as at present assessed bear heavily on tradespeople, on smallholders and market gardeners, and on all who put land to its best use, thus discouraging the use of land and encouraging its withdrawal from labour, thereby causing unemployment and low wages.

(4) That taxes on necessities, such as tea and sugar, and rates levied on buildings, fall severely and unfairly upon all workers.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that you will be pleased to—

(1) Levy such a tax upon the value of all land whether in town or country as will compel its full use, so that a demand for labour may be created that will ensure a just wage to both town and rural workers;

(2) Apply the money raised by that tax to take the place of the tea and sugar duties which press so heavily

on the poor, and to reduce the rates for education, poor relief, main roads, police and asylums, which as now assessed are a burden and a penalty on industry.

Your Petitioners know that a tax on land values cannot be a tax on agriculture or any industry. Such a tax would fall upon what the Prime Minister has called "the communal value" of land, and we welcome his statement that "he regarded this question as of great importance, both in its urban and in its rural aspects, although, in his opinion, the rural aspect was more urgent at the present time."

Furthermore, your Petitioners pray that you may be pleased to receive this Petition, and to come to Swindon to reply to those who look to you to uphold the rights of the people against monopoly and privilege.

This is an inspiring call to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and for the sake of the cause of genuine and enduring progress we hope and trust it will receive his most serious consideration.

A. W. M.

WANTED—A LAND PROGRAMME.

Under this heading the DAILY CITIZEN, the official organ of the Labour Party, of December 2nd, writes its leading article. The opinion is expressed that the Liberal Party will not attempt "drastic land reform" because of "Liberal Earls and Landowners." We are told:—

Young Liberals may sing their land songs, but the Prime Minister has definitely stated that he does not approve of the principle of land nationalisation, and it is still less likely that the Earl of Crewe or the Earl of Aberdeen or Earl Spencer or Earl Carrington or the Marquis of Breadalbane or the Earl of Craven or the Earl of Liverpool or the Earl of Granard—all ardent Liberals and members of the Ministry or Officers of State—will follow far in that direction. Nor will they subscribe to the doctrines of the Single Tax. Mr. Josiah Wedgwood may pipe, but Liberal earls and landowners will refuse to dance. Still, the land problem presses for solution. . . . The land of Britain has been legally stolen from the British people—that, in short, is the real land problem, and it is a problem which in the last resort will only be solved by a strong, independent political movement among the artisans and labourers themselves. In the realm of immediate constructive legislation much can be done. If there is to be a revival of rural life there must be a far-reaching policy of housing. . . . It is estimated that at least 100,000 new cottages are required to meet the needs of rural England, and if an annual grant were made from the national exchequer to the local authorities amounting to one-tenth the cost of one Dreadnought the rural housing problem would speedily disappear. The dearth of rural cottages cannot, of course, be divorced from the scandalously low wages of the labourers, for these social evils are closely interlinked. A legal minimum wage for labourers is now a matter of immediate practical politics. The operations of the Trade Boards in other industries justify the hope that their extension to agriculture would stamp out the worst phases of sweating, and would at least raise the wages paid by the worst farmers to the level of the best. But if the labourer is to attain any real measure of economic independence he must have land. The Small Holdings Act of 1908 was drafted, in the main, on right lines, but its working has been clogged and obstructed by the territorial interests which control so many of the county councils. Under this Act about 150,000 acres have been leased to small holders, Norfolk, Cambridge, Somerset and Devon leading the way. But the demand is still greatly in excess of the supply and amendments are necessary to remove the defects of the measure, to deal with inactive or frankly antagonistic councils, and to ensure that good land shall be let at a sufficiently reasonable rent to give the small holder a chance. In the urban districts the policy of land taxation must be increasingly adopted, both because of its valuable