

"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 GOVERNMENT AND THEIR LAND POLICY

The enunciation of a special land campaign on behalf of the Government with no more than a random attack on the existing system of rating, has been received with chagrin and disappointment by hosts of Radicals who know by their own experience as campaigners how long and how intimately the Taxation of Land Values has been associated with the official programme of the Liberal Party. Political agitation could hardly have forced any question more to the front or gained for it wider acceptance. The years of spade-work have found expression in the declaration of hundreds of Liberal candidates, in the resolutions passed at countless representative Liberal meetings and conferences, in the debates and votes of the House of Commons, in the warm devotion of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, in the tireless propaganda of the late Lord Advocate, and in the solid pledges of the present Prime Minister and many members of his Cabinet. Yet when a vigorous onslaught on land monopoly is announced, which is to appeal to the popular imagination and carry the democratic cause farther on its road to victory, the Taxation of Land Values, so earnestly advocated by the rank and file and so fully endorsed by the leaders, has to give place to schemes unheard of until lately within Liberal circles, which breathe, not the freedom of Liberalism, but the sordid machinery of State charity and the contemptuous restrictions invented by Fabian Socialists.

There have been no popular demonstrations in favour of a juggle with public money to build cottages, no popular demand to set up a board of benevolent despots who shall declare what they think rent should be or threaten a man with economic destruction because

he refuses to pay another a given wage. The agitation has been for equality of opportunity and for the right of each man to the produce of his labour undiminished by the claims of monopoly and special privilege. The agitation has denied the morality of taxes and imposts on industry, and has declared the public value of land to be the just and proper source of public revenues. But the superior people, who scorn these aspirations of democracy and have learned to respect only the right of vested interests to levy toll on the production of wealth, also have their representatives in the counsels of the Liberal Party. The present Cabinet proposals are proof of the power of these people, and their influence will prevail until the Radical rank and file choose to assert themselves. In the meantime the Liberal land programme is a policy largely of grandiloquent phrases and ineffective palliatives. Coming from above and clothed in the spurious authority of complaisant "experts," it is sure to clash very soon with the insistent demand for the genuine reforms that in our day have made an unbridgeable gulf between those who uphold the existing order and those who are determined so to alter the distribution of wealth that the non-producer shall cease to live on the earnings of his fellows.

We are aware that the Liberal land programme is as yet incomplete. From our point of view it may not be completed for some time. The intention to formulate a fighting land policy was announced nearly two years ago with the boastful promise that the land question was no longer to be handled as if it were a hedgehog. The opening of the campaign was repeatedly postponed until the party man on the platform and in the press, alarmed at the course of the by-elections, lost patience and demanded some kind of oracular statement if political reputations were to be saved and the taunts of opponents silenced. We hope the journalists and others whose services are so ready to command for party warfare are pleased with the proposals. In their ignorance they must have been amazed to see the warmest support coming from every politically hostile quarter, and men like Lord Salisbury, Lord Lansdowne, Lord Rothschild, Mr. Bonar Law, and Mr. Joynson Hicks joining the chorus of praise. But these self-styled politicians and

file leaders of opinion in opposing camps, at variance on almost every cause, but united in their hostility to the taxation of land values, are enjoying a short-lived triumph. The usual avenues to the discussion of the Taxation of Land Values are closed against us. The Chancellor of the Exchequer himself had to submit to the taboo of the London Liberal press, whose morning papers severely cut down his references to rating reform at Middlesbrough, while one Liberal evening journal rigorously excluded any mention whatever of the subject. The Land Inquiry Committee have had the same experience, for among all the reviews of its bulky report on rural conditions scarcely one mention has been made of the excellent chapter on rural rating, with its conclusive evidence proving the injustice and penalising effect of imposing public burdens on industry and improvements.

And while the rent court, the wages boards and the State cottages are being boomed as the means to strangle land monopoly, the Colonial Secretary, Mr. Lewis Harcourt, at Bradford, on 7th November, states that an economic and living wage on the land is, in his opinion, capable of producing an economic and sufficient return to the cultivator, the occupier and the owner, and that "there is no cause for alarm at the proposals we shall make, for it is our desire and intention to place the whole industry of the land upon an economic basis . . . and on an economic basis no injustice can be done to any of the three partners in the industry." The Marquis of Lincolnshire tells a DAILY CHRONICLE interviewer, in alluding to the proposed rent courts, that references to impartial arbitrators have invariably increased rents, and the increase has been cheerfully paid by the tenant farmers concerned. The Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, tells his constituents in Berwick, on the 27th October, that it is quite wrong to suppose that the general characteristic of our land system is abuse of the land, and that for his part he would do nothing to touch the credit either of people who own land, or have mortgages upon land, or have loaned money on land, and so forth.

It is stated that following hot upon the Land Inquiry Committee, a Liberal Land Campaign Committee is being constituted. When the speakers attached to this

Committee get abroad they will find the proposals, patronised and approved by Tory and Whig alike, will arouse but a passing interest, and their propaganda will end in disaster, if it is not forced beyond their control in a Radical direction.

It is no wonder that those belonging to the land values movement are in turn becoming impatient. They acknowledge the difficulties of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. They know that some of the worst enemies of their proposal are to be found within the Liberal Cabinet itself. They are aware that the whole question of the rating and taxation of land values has been remitted to a Departmental Committee, whose decision politicians will not care to prejudice by official pronouncements. But they protest that the Liberal Party, if it has not been guilty all these years of practising deception by simulating support with mere lip service, is pledged to the hilt to their policy. No dependence on Departmental Committees, no respect for heaven-sent Foreign Secretaries, can blot out such pledges, nor need they form the excuse for withholding a robust statement of fundamental principles such as has been announced time and again in the name of the Liberal Party. While the Taxation of Land Values movement looks with confidence to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to fill in the serious gaps in his programme, and to specify very much more distinctly what he means by the "reform of the rating system," they welcome the postponement of his Glasgow meeting where he was seemingly not prepared to talk the kind of land reform a Glasgow audience demands, and they have determined to use this excellent opportunity to take the field themselves. Perhaps by this appeal to the rank and file Radicals in the most Radical section of the country it will be possible to awaken the Government from its lethargy and enable it to shake off both its internal and external enemies. During the next month we shall know what Glasgow, Dundee, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, and other centres in Scotland have to say to the pretentious nonsense that rent courts, wages boards and State charity are the means to grapple boldly with the land monopoly that is sapping the life-blood of the nation.

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