



LAND & LIBERTY

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THE ISSUE AT THE ELECTION

Imagine a village of say a hundred voters. Imagine two of these villagers to make such a proposition as this: "We are desirous, fellow-citizens, of seeing you more prosperous and to that end propose this plan: Give us the privilege of collecting a tax of five cents a day from everyone in the village. No one will feel the tax much, for even to a man with a wife and eight children it will only come to the paltry sum of fifty cents a day. Yet this slight tax will give our village two rich citizens who can afford to spend money. We will at once begin to live in commensurate style. We will enlarge our houses and improve our grounds, set up carriages, hire servants, give parties and buy much more freely at the stores. This will make trade brisk and cause a greater demand for labour. This, in turn, will create a greater demand for agricultural productions, which will enable the neighbouring farmers to make a greater demand for store goods and the labour of mechanics. Thus shall we all become prosperous."

There is no country under the sun a village in which the people would listen to such a proposition.—Henry George in *Protection or Free Trade*, Chap. viii., of the new Abridged Edition.

The General Election takes place on 30th May and the campaign from end to end of the country is in progress. Something pregnant with possibilities for good or evil is considered to be in the ballot boxes when their secret is revealed. There are not a few minor issues but the main issue is undoubtedly the problem of unemployment. Mr Lloyd George threw this issue into the arena and there it will stay until the fight is over.

The Conservative Party puts forward the legislation it has carried as the claim to a renewed vote of confidence. The Labour Party has issued a comprehensive manifesto in which it is declared that if returned to power a Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer will budget for a tax on land values. If the Labour Party is returned, Mr Snowden is certain to occupy his former position at the Treasury. He has given his pledged word that the taxation of land values will figure in his financial proposals.

The Manifesto of the Liberal Party is their book

We Can Conquer Unemployment, with its leading proposals for an enormous national loan to be spent upon road-making, bridge-building, land drainage, electric supply, telephone extensions and other schemes of national development. The loan would be repaid out of "the increasing revenue of the Road Fund" so that the argument, reduced to its essentials, is that money taken from people who drive motors on the roads can be so spent by the State that more men will find work than if the same money was used by the taxpayers themselves. It is well to remember that the Road Fund is only another name for the levy of taxation on transport by means of vehicle duties. The revenue from these duties (if not reduced or repealed) is likely to increase as more and more motors are put on the roads, and in that sense only is there any support for the claim that this policy of giving employment can be put into practice "without any additional charge in the way of taxation." It is another way of saying that the Liberals propose, as security for the addition to public debt, to preserve and maintain the taxes that seriously interfere with trade and industry, add to prices and are certainly one of the causes of the unemployment it is sought to cure.

Much is said about the Liberal Party's contention that any amount of money is lying idle or is doing nothing very useful, and that investors will be found in plenty to subscribe to the projected 200 million pound loan. The question is, do the people who have that money at some bank or in some stocking, "frozen savings" so named, keep their eyes quite closed to their opportunities? Are they likely to be attracted to the new national loan if it returns no more than the rate of interest that could be obtained from other investments that they can buy with this "idle money" at any moment? It is obvious that the State will have to offer these though less people better terms to stir them up and awaken them to a due and proper sense of their own interest. And let it not be forgotten that in so far as the issue is a success the value of other stocks and shares will be depressed, with corresponding loss to those who now hold them. It is further suggested that if the people called "we" can afford to lend money to Munich for gas and water development they can afford to do the same for Birmingham and Glasgow. But the British Treasury can only divert money into its coffers for the building of roads to or from Birmingham or Glasgow if it tempts the investor with a better reward; and that reward we are given to understand is to be got by taxing transport, the "Road Fund" being the keystone of this plan to take the boots off some working people and put them on the feet of others.

If the increasing receipts of the Road Fund are not enough to meet the interest on the loan (and how much of these receipts would be needed for new road maintenance does not enter into the calculations) we are reminded that there is the prospect of getting 5 or 6 million pounds more revenue a year out of the pockets of the wage-earning classes, when "for purposes of illustration" 750,000 of them now out of work are employed and are thus able to increase their expenditure on taxable commodities. To this 5 or 6 million pounds we are

asked to add the receipts, in indirect and direct taxation, on the increased income and profits received by contractors and manufacturers as a direct result of this increase in employment. This corresponding figure is put at from £3,000,000 to £4,000,000. The additional receipts in taxation by the State under existing taxes as a direct result of the restoration of a number of workers of this magnitude to industry would therefore, by the estimate, be a figure of between £8,000,000 and £10,000,000 per annum.

The ink is scarcely dry on the pages of the book with its assurance that wages will rise by spending borrowed money and that the new purchasing power will add to the public revenue, when the Conservative Government drops 6½ million pounds out of the purse, in abolishing the tea duty. This, and what it suggests in the removal of other similar taxes, must have upset the expert calculations. The point to be emphasized here is that if the Liberals are going to depend on the yield of existing taxation to make their roads and mend their bridges then they are committed to an upholding of the safeguarding duties and of other duties on commodities they are pledged to remit.

A policy that brings grist to the mill out of "taxable commodities" is not a free trade policy, however else it may be described. This expert Liberal finance is a direct and a cunning slap in the face to Liberal Free Traders. Its theme throughout is that only money is wanted. Who pays is of no consequence. The incidence of taxation is neither here nor there.

Every one of the proposals for spending the national loan involves land purchase. This fact is treated lightly with the remark that "in a great many cases the roads can be carried through comparatively undeveloped country and therefore not very large sums are required." It is not necessary to dwell on this expert opinion. The prices extorted for those strips of ground even in the most remote territory are a public scandal. The book tells the speculative landowner in maps and diagrams that this or that road should be driven through his property. What this expectation means to him is instanced in the book by the London tubes, how *before these extensions were commenced* "their mere announcement led to transactions in land along the proposed routes at enormously enhanced values." Other examples of arterial road developments are quoted, of agricultural land worth £30 to £50 an acre before the road was contemplated that could not be bought for less than £250 or £300 an acre; of the land for which the Surrey County Council had to pay at the rate of £1,250 an acre that a short time before was not worth more than £300 an acre.

So much for the land in "comparatively undeveloped country." You may earmark a little there for the landowner but next come the "great trunk roads" that are to be carried into "the heart of the cities." A big slice of the 200 million pounds loan will be carved off for the landowning fraternity in that quarter. Here is the testimony of no less an authority than Mr Neville Chamberlain, speaking on 18th October, 1927, to a Town Planning

Advisory Committee:—

"Everyone who has been concerned in the administration of a great town knows how, when you want to cut a little bit off the side of one of your busiest streets to give a little bit of ease to your congested traffic, you have to pour out money by the thousands of pounds for every yard you snatch for the need of the community."

If the truth in this regard can be put so frankly by the Minister of Health and by the Liberal leader in his earlier public speeches, why is it ignored in this official Liberal policy? Is it for this kind of thing that they declare "we are ready with schemes of work which we can put immediately into operation?" They have no plans for dealing with the land monopoly that holds up in advance all enterprise whether public or private. The argument in a stroke of the pen dismisses the taxation of land values from the programme of the Liberal Party, and Liberal candidates who may be returned to Parliament are pledged to nothing except the raising of a public loan that would only stiffen the monopoly price of land. On that rock the schemes of employment will assuredly be shattered, going to pieces after the manner of the after-the-war reconstruction schemes that were conditioned upon the landowner receiving "full value" out of the taxpayers' pocket, according to the undertaking of Mr Lloyd George himself.

What was then called reconstruction is now called national development. It is the spending of public money to improve "our national estate" as the book says—that is, to enhance the value of land privately owned and correspondingly worsen the condition of the disinherited millions. When the job is done, after this "concentration over a short period" the "road gangs," as Mr Churchill aptly calls them, will be in search of employment as they are at present with the same conditions existing that now cause low wages and poverty. The Liberal policy does not pretend to grapple with these conditions. It does not admit their existence. The thought that some injustice is at the root of the trouble is not there. All that can be done is to make work for the time being in the hope that somehow things will get better of themselves in due time with the rising and the setting of the sun. If this book represents the outlook of people calling themselves Liberals, the face of British politics has changed and the Liberal Party that once took sides for the individual against monopoly and privilege is no more.

The Liberal Unemployment book makes repeated reference to betterment, as it is called—the increase in the value of land that is due to public improvements. This is illustrated by several examples, and the saying is that "some part" or a "due contribution" must be taken back to help to pay for the new roads and railways and drainage schemes after they have raised the value of land. It is the mischievous and discriminating increment tax over again, put on this stage to play up to the public sentiment for land value taxation with which it had no connection whatever. The failure of the 1909 increment tax is on record. It had to be repealed because it would not work. Mr Lloyd George as

the then Prime Minister had his hand in this act of destruction. He is now stumping the country with this book as his guide which proposes a plan that is even less practical or possible. With all its faults the 1909 increment tax at least had for its basis a general valuation of the land. There is no such valuation now. Those who wrote the book know this is so. They want emergency powers to get busy with schemes that by their own confession will put untold sums in the pockets of landowners before a single man is employed and before a stone is laid in their new development. For their proposed betterment tax to get back "some of" that gift, they have made no provision. In their own words they have still to devise the means "by which the betterment values can best be drawn upon to assist in the problem"; and if ever means are devised, by that time the landowners will, in Mr Snowden's words, have been enriched beyond the dreams of avarice.

Public opinion governs politics. Let it be made for the taxation of land values and the unemployment problem can and will be solved.

A. W. M.

Among the many favourable notices of Mr Jakob Lange's now famous work is one in the April issue of *The Countryman*, which states that "In exchange for good, bad and indifferent books by Britain about Denmark, we have now *A Danish View of British Farming*, a vigorous little book by a Dane on rural England. (By post 1s. 1d. from *Land & Liberty* offices.)

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In its issue of 30th March, the *Bristol Labour Weekly* publishes, under the heading "Shot and Shell," some excellent points for speakers and canvassers on land value taxation and rating. We congratulate the writer of the article, Mr C. T. Campion, M.A. (a reader of *Land & Liberty*), on his able analysis of the problem and the useful summary which he has presented to campaigners in his district.

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Mr Arthur G. Meeze, in an article published on 12th April by the *Stroud Journal*:—"The trader's interests are bound up with the industrialist's, and they must stand or fall together. Free Trade, with its accompanying lower prices, and the Taxation of Land Values are essential to the continued prosperity of both interests."

BOOKS OF LOUIS F. POST

The Deportations Delirium of Nineteen-Twenty.

Charles H. Kerr & Company, 341 East Ohio Street, Chicago, Ills. Cloth, \$1.50 (6s. 3d.), post paid.

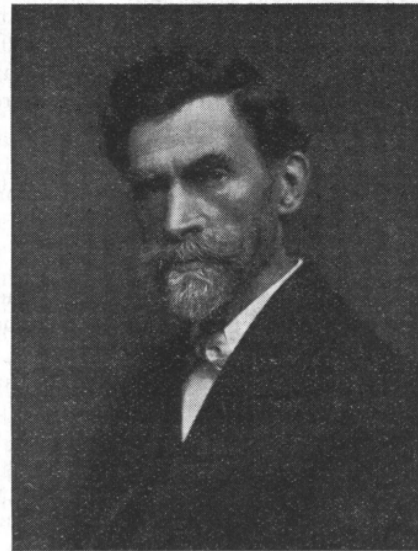
What is the Single Tax? Vanguard Press, 80 Fifth Avenue, New York City. Cloth, 55 cents. (Obtainable also from *Land & Liberty* offices at 2s. 8d. post paid.)

The Basic Facts of Economics (Second Edition).

Wm. Ballantyne & Sons, 1421 F Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. Cloth, 50 cents, post paid. (Obtainable also from *Land & Liberty* offices at 2s. 2d. post paid.)

Social Service. Mrs Louis F. Post, 2513 Twelfth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. Cloth, \$1.00 (4s. 2d.), post paid. Paper, slightly damaged, 50 cents (2s. 1d.), post paid.

JOHN MUIR



The Scottish League notes last month carried the news of the death of Bailie John Muir, Glasgow, who on 9th March passed peacefully away at his home after a few days' illness, aged 81 years.

He was a Justice of the Peace when he was elected to the City Council in 1910, and six years later had the distinction of being made Senior Magistrate of the City.

But it is as a follower of Henry George that John Muir will be remembered by his most intimate friends. He was a Glasgow Single Taxer. He had a fine sense of humour, and his platform speeches were ever of a bold and uncompromising character. "Give me justice," he once remarked in a public discussion, "and I will look after my own liberty; and given justice, when I look to myself I can't help looking after my neighbour as well, even if I felt like forgetting him and his rights."

That was the thought that inspired the man. He was publicly known as an able advocate of Henry George's practical proposals and could relate the teaching to municipal life in homely, telling language. But, above and beyond this calling, he occupied the highest ground in the never-ending desire to solve social problems. It was John Muir's religion that God made the land for the people, and an inch of this ground he would not yield in any argument to any man, at any time or in any place. He was no bore, and could enliven his talk with a wealth of illustration culled from his daily life and observation. To John Muir poverty was a crime, the direct outcome of disobedience to Nature's law in social and industrial life. In business he was just as eager to give a customer a lesson on elementary political economy as sell him a pair of boots. He could do both things with a charm that brought him no ill will, but increasing esteem and friendship. On the platform his earnestness, his profound belief in what he was saying, never failed to impress his audiences and evoke in them the desire to hear him to the end.

I loved the man, and in saying this I am speaking for each and all of his Glasgow colleagues. In his passing the Scottish League has lost one of its most devoted leaders and the City of Glasgow one of the best of its public servants. The United Committee join with the Scottish League in mourning the loss of their colleague, and in deepest sympathy with his family circle in their bereavement.

J. P.