

### "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.

### LIBERAL LAND POLICY AND THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTION.

The hopes recently raised that Mr. Lloyd George would during January expound his proposals for a radical reform of the land system have not been fulfilled. Mr. Lloyd George has himself made no public pronouncement as to his intentions, but the statements in the Press that the campaign has been postponed "until some time in the spring" no doubt correctly represent the Chancellor's decision not to take any steps in the meanwhile. The delay seems inevitable, for recent political events—the attention of Parliament to the Irish Home Rule and Welsh Disestablishment questions, both demanding prompt settlement, and the crisis over the Franchise Bill—have made it clear that for the Chancellor to have embarked at this stage upon the advocacy of sound land legislation would have been not only premature but imprudent from a political point of view, if he is honestly determined to conserve all the available strength of the Liberal Party and outside support in his attack upon landlordism. No doubt it will be difficult at any time to discount the risk of adverse influences within the Liberal Party, but the fear diminishes as the discussion on the injustices and abuses of land monopoly becomes more and more widespread. Time is on the side of radical land reform. Progress has been made and will continue to be made by the educative efforts of an ever-growing body of convinced supporters of our ideas who need no guiding spirit to force the pace, and in the coming campaign we welcome and look forward to the eloquence and personal magnetism of the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the promotion of "a thorough, complete change in our land system" based upon the taxation and rating of land values.

In view of the plain-spoken and decisive tone of his speeches at Bath, Swansea and Aberdeen, and of letters sent to candidates at by-elections, Mr. Lloyd George's mind is evidently bent on a policy of liberating the land from the bondage of monopoly. The inquiry now proceeding into the system of land tenure and taxation should supply him with illuminating facts and arguments for his coming campaign. The halting and haphazard schemes of land courts, minimum wage legislation, and State cottages at uneconomic rents, proclaimed in certain newspapers as the new Liberal land policy, can be dismissed as mere journalistic guesswork. In any event, the answer to agitation on these lines is—that way lies disaster.

Meanwhile the opportunity for a clear statement of our case in public is provided by the forthcoming London County Council elections. The Progressive Party, which is composed of various elements as is the Liberal Party, has officially declared in favour of the rating of the land values and the unrating of buildings and improvements, and a large number of sincere advocates of our reform are standing in the Progressive interest. As the Glasgow City Council led the way in Scotland by its representations to Parliament for powers to rate land values, so can the London County Council, the most powerful and influential governing body in England, lead the way for the whole country in demanding that the existing rating system shall be entirely reformed. The Council has no power to alter the law. It can only administer the law. But it is for the Progressives, if they are returned by a majority, to insist that the London County Council shall no longer be the helpless tools of a system the operation of which day after day, month after month, is responsible for the problems which they have to meet with in municipal life and which they have been trying to solve mostly by expensive and ludicrous frontal attacks on land monopoly.

They are obliged to place a rate upon every building and improvement erected within their jurisdiction, and so render it difficult for enterprise and industry to have a chance. They have to instruct the rate collector

to pass by some 12,000 acres of vacant land, and leave the monopolist entrenched in his privilege to speculate in the land and hold it from use. Faced with the disgrace, in a large and wealthy city, of disease-breeding and overcrowded slums, they attempt clearance schemes and pay over vast sums of public money in ransom to landowners, which can only be collected by imposing a tariff on all the houses and business premises in the whole metropolis. But even then they find that poverty obstinately has the better of them and the poor go elsewhere to create new slums.

Another method is attempted of buying land on the outskirts of the town, which is "cheap" until purchase is proposed. The Council project the building of model houses, and find that, according to the law, they are themselves compelled to levy rates upon the results of their own enterprise. The scheme is abandoned because the rents would be higher than the people whom it is intended to house can pay, and the land lies derelict and a charge upon the rates. To supplement low wages the Council encourages workmen's fares; it feeds school children and provides public charity, with the inevitable result that rents rise and the benefit of these perfectly honest attempts to improve conditions falls ultimately into the pocket of the landowner. This is the outcome of every endeavour to make London a happier, healthier, and a better place to live in, and it is no wonder that experience has taught the London County Council as well as every local governing body in the country to delay to the last possible moment even such an urgently needed thing as a wider street or a broader bridge.

In some official quarters, however, the lesson has not been properly learned nor the full bearing of the disastrous effects of taxing improvements understood. There is still a sentiment among those who ought to know better that the "equalisation of rates" as now levied in London is a reform which will solve the problem of unjust distribution; but this proposal is about as wise and necessary as the proposal would be to equalise, say, a window tax, supposing it fell with unequal incidence in various parts of London. It would do about as much good as the equalising of an unequal protective tariff, under which each port in the Kingdom arbitrarily levied its own

duties. The reform that was called for in the case of the window tax was its entire abolition, and the only sensible reform of the protective tariffs would be the sweeping away of the taxes upon goods. Similarly, the only reform of the rating system that is worth consideration by anybody who pretends to be concerned about just distribution is the elimination of buildings and improvements from the standard of assessment. We can see no popular enthusiasm for a proposal, which, leaving the basis of assessment as it is, would reduce rates in some parts of London to be counterbalanced by increased rates elsewhere. Were the richer parts of London in this way to subsidise the poorer parts of London, the benefits would ultimately accrue to the landowners of the poorer parts in higher rents, reacting in precisely the same way as relief to the rates from the National Exchequer or from tramway profits.

The unjust distribution of rates is due to their unjust incidence, and on that ground alone, honestly maintained and vigorously defended, can the Progressives hope to put themselves in lasting favour with the people of London. Let them therefore go forward in the fight determined to have power not merely to "make the landowner pay his share of the rates" as compared with the occupier, but to exempt the property of the individual from taxation, and to draw the revenue required for public purposes from the value of land that belongs to the whole community.

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### PSEUDO LAND REFORM.

In many papers it is currently reported that: "Members of Mr. Lloyd George's Committee are at present studying the Irish land purchase Acts in order to draft out a scheme based on the principles of the Irish system which may be applied in a modified way to this country. They are in sympathy with the ideals of the Wyndham Act of 1903."

For ourselves we do not credit this statement. But we know of nothing more calculated to destroy the illusions of land purchase advocates than the study of the practical financial results of the Wyndham Act of 1903. When that Act was passed the rented rural land of Ireland, which the Act proposed to transfer from one set of landlords to another set of landlords, was estimated at a capital or selling value of one hundred million pounds sterling. Six years later, in 1909, the public was informed that this was a mistake, and that the capital value of this land was really at least one hundred and eighty million pounds sterling—an advance of eighty per cent. To induce the Irish landlords graciously to consent to part with their land—which in 1903 according to Mr. A. J. Balfour "was not then and had not been for years a marketable commodity"—it was considered necessary to vote them a little bonus of some 12 per cent.