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NEW YEAR PRESENTS

THE LEGISLATION foreshadowed by the Government holds out little prospect for rentpayers and taxpayers except increased burdens. There are gifts in store for other sections of the community. The rent receivers and the tax eaters sup with a long spoon at the table of the industrious, enjoying the feast that is almost forced down their throats and they call for more; but the bill of payment is not presented to them. If anyone complain that there is less for some because others get more, and there is still less for the company because some who eat are neither purveyors nor cooks, let that matter be referred to the scientists who can vary the meals to increase the vitamin content. Or the Economic Advisory Council and the professors and groups who study economic planning can see to it, helped by the money authorities, who can trace whatever trouble there be to disequilibrium in the management of currency and credit. Others can be consulted about the efficiency of the knives and forks, the size or shape of the soup plates, and whether it is necessary for some chairs to have cushions. One subject alone is debarred, namely, that some are eating who do not produce, because the discussion of it would condemn every law and institution that enables one man to put his hand in another man's pocket as by right. This may be reckoned a victory for the defenders of the present order that they have on their side all the amiable reformers and economists so-called, who have discarded such words or thoughts as monopoly and privilege and parasitism, these being the out-of-date terms of a doctrine that is either defunct or is but "fighting a rearguard action," as Mr A. J. Cummings, of the *News Chronicle*, put it not so long ago.

The alliance between these modern economic experts and the mischievous interests that true freedom would destroy may be unconscious; but it is there, in the terminology which tries to conceal the economic theft being committed in society, and in the consent which treats privilege as no theft, but as a form of property only to be surrendered against payment of full compensation. When the word "privilege" comes into its own again, gets its place on the platforms of the progressive parties and on the lips of their leaders, politics will at last count for something in this country.

We should have someone tearing away the veil from subterfuge and stratagems when we contemplate what the Government is proposing and what its predecessors have done. The first Act of the New Year will be to pass the Live Stock Bill, for which the necessary money resolution has already been adopted, imposing Customs duties on foreign beef and veal and voting £5,000,000 a year to home cattle breeders. The duties (which are not levied on Dominion produce) are estimated to yield £3,250,000 a year so that the general taxpayer will be called upon for the balance. The duties fall on the food

of the poorest classes who are thus compelled to provide the bulk of the subsidy. Not only so. They will have to pay considerably more, for the price of the untaxed Dominion produce sold in competition with the taxed foreign produce will also rise. Producers in the Dominions will get that amount of spoil at the expense of consumers in this country. The benefited cattle breeders will not long retain the benefit. If their position is eased either by money assistance or by better prices for their cattle, nothing is more certain than that the land which is suitable for cattle rearing will go up in value. The gift will be to the land speculators both in this country and in the Dominions, setting economic forces at work which are worse than a plague to agriculture. Besides this hurt to all land users, the economic theft from the parties immediately concerned is obvious. It is the forceful taking of the pennies of those who can least afford to pay, by the wicked instrument of Customs tariff, and handing the money as so much graft under police protection to cattle breeders enabling them in turn to meet the exactions of the land monopolist.

It is a further step in the long procession of legislative Acts in the supposed interests of agriculture, which, not beginning with but typified by the 1928 Act "derating" farm land, have given the sugar beet subsidy, the wheat subsidy, the restriction on potato and hop growing, the milk and pig and bacon marketing boards, the tariffs on a mass of foodstuffs "to benefit producers" but in the end only stiffening the price of land. The tax-borne aids to agriculture are such as would make a long list. In total they amount to more than £40,000,000 a year. But agriculture is in no better case by testimony of the "agriculturists" as they call themselves. The cry is for more and more doles and more protection. In the debate, 15th December, on the money resolution for the Live Stock Bill, Tories protested that the beef tariff was not nearly high enough. It should be much more and there should be duty also on Dominion produce.

Here are some Press references showing how things are working out.

The *Sunday Times*, 13th December, states that nearly 50,000 fewer workers are employed on the land in England and Wales than was the case two years ago . . . yet "the land has not lost its appeal, for only one in seven of the applications made under the Small Holdings Act can be satisfied." What's wrong, in fact, is that the land is too dear.

The *Manchester Guardian* of 9th December quotes the report of the Food Council on the bacon and pig marketing schemes, with the complaint of retailers that "prices are so high as to put bacon out of general reach of the poorest sections of the community" and the report observes that "bacon is not nearly as plentiful and cheap as it was in 1931-32."

The landed interest has its spokesmen in the reports of two firms of real estate agents quoted in the *Daily Telegraph*, 23rd and 29th December. Messrs John D. Wood & Co. say: "The outlook for the investor in agricultural land is intimately bound up with questions over which the individual landowner and farmer have no control. Imports, the effect of subsidies, the marketing boards . . . are some of the matters that bear on it. The Government is clearly alive to the needs of the industry. . . . Hunting seems more than ever in favour. . . . Shooting counts for more than ever it did." And Messrs Jackson Stops and Staff say in regard to agricultural land that practically every county in England is represented in their sales list and "a hardening of prices is noted, particularly in Northern districts. . . . In Scotland sporting estates have sold readily at good prices."

So much for the doles and subsidies and the land values maintained and increased through no effort on the part of the individual landowner. But there is nothing for the working farmer after this rake off, nothing for the agricultural labourer, no chance for the applicant small holder, no hope for the unemployed to get independent footing in his own country. The alternative is to emigrate and an accommodating Government is to renew the ill-famed Empire Settlement Act for another 15 years making £22,500,000 available to help the exiles overseas. The original Act (1922) pledged £45,000,000 but not half the money was spent. How this scheme of transference broke down against the wall of high-priced land in the Dominions, raised in anticipation of the immigrants, is on record. A suitable preamble to the new Bill would be the story of the cheated and ruined settlers in Victoria, and how these emigrants had to return home again.

But the most lavish gift from the Government to vested interest in privilege and monopoly, if the Government is not overturned beforehand or in the process of making it, is to buy from them the God-given naturally deposited coal resources of Great Britain. The Bill will have some such title as the unification of mineral royalties and was on the list in the King's Speech of 3rd November, which was before the abdication. King Edward since made his tour of the South Wales Distressed Area. He had visual proof of the calamities wrought by the present land system and gave his promise that some remedy would be found. It would have been the grimmest of jokes to crown the coronation with a Royal signature to the gift of 100 to 200 millions to the receivers of royalties and wayleaves, for releasing their hold not only on coal worked but also on all the unworked and yet unexploited mineral deposits which are the property of the whole people. There may be therefore some truth, after all, in the rumours that abdication came about for reasons additional to questions connected with the King's domestic affairs. Obey as a constitutional monarch must the will of Parliament, whatever opinion he may have of the legislation submitted, even the invention that he would rather resign than give his hand to such an outrageous Act would be to his honour.

The responsibility for such policies lies with Parliament and its Members. An instance is afforded in the speech by Mr R. Gibson on the distress in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland which we report elsewhere for the grave and terrible but true picture he presents. But we have left his proposed remedy for comment. It is that with the extermination of the deer as a plague and a pest "the land of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland should be nationalized, for unless that is done it is difficult to see how money spent on improvement of land will not go straight into the pockets of the landlords." But will Mr Gibson say what he means by the nationalizing of the land? Is it purchase he is after, on the lines of the Coal Royalties Bill? If so it is a monstrous proposition. The land of the Highlands and Islands, reckoned per head of the population, is probably the dearest land in the whole world and however cheap it were, purchase with public money is the way not to abolish the land monopoly but to confirm it. Every argument that Mr Gibson gave was an argument for the Taxation of Land Values and for the assertion of the equal rights of the people to the land without any compensation whatever to the present receivers of the rent or to those who have speculated in the value of the country's natural resources. So we would caution Labour men and Liberals too against the use of this long word "nationalization" if it is left undefined or if, being defined, it means ransom to the monopolists out of the

public revenue. Land purchase proposals are often made to seem justified by pretty accountancy figures showing that the rents payable in future to the State or the municipality will meet the interest and redemption of the land bonds and the public will enjoy any new increases in land value. This is altogether beside the mark. Every penny of the rent of land which is now privately appropriated is a penny lost to the public revenue and necessitates the imposition of taxation on production and its earnings. The conversion of the rent of land into interest on land bonds would perpetuate the private drain on the public revenue and compel the continued resort to all those vicious forms of taxation by which the State robs the industrious and penalizes every useful effort to make wealth abundant. We cannot believe that this is the considered policy of either the Labour or the Liberal Party.

For ourselves, the gift of a New Year is the gift of new opportunity: to press forward with our educational work: to make opinion so that this thought will ultimately dominate the minds of the people and their elected representatives, that the land is the natural inheritance of all; and act accordingly through constitutional changes in the law, so that the taxation now falling on the work of man's hand be abolished and the value of land be taken instead for the common good. That is the practical, certain and just way to the better distribution of wealth. Who will help in this campaign? Who will give more help in the coming year?

A. W. M.

Mr Arthur Chamberlain, presiding at the General Meeting of Tube Investments, Ltd., reported in the *Glasgow Herald*, 3rd December: "No nation was strangled by not having the control of the countries where its raw materials were produced. There was hardly a known instance where the producer of raw material had not sold wherever he could get the best price. The so-called possession of colonies had not in modern times added to the wealth of any country. What had added to the wealth of a country was trade, the development of its own resources, and their exchange for those of other peoples, and it mattered not a jot whether that trade was done with foreign countries, with colonies or its own nationals as long only as it was done. . . . If Germany, Italy and France would only look at what was happening all round them dispassionately, instead of through a mist of hate, of braggadocio and of fear, they would realize the truth of what he was saying. If they were willing to join with others in reducing tariffs, quotas and currency restrictions our answer must be clear, immediate and ungrudging."

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THE RELIGION OF HENRY GEORGE is the title of a new booklet of 16 pages written by John Archer. Like everything from his pen, it is a fervid statement of the highest religious principles and moral standards. The Henry George philosophy is considered in the light of the Sermon on the Mount and no one may gainsay the soundness of the author's interpretations. The booklet is a reprint of the address John Archer recently delivered in Keighley. Special donations have made possible this publication, so that not only is there a surplus for the benefit of the Yorkshire League, who are the publishers, but also the League enjoys the revenue from sales. The price is 2d. per copy. A quantity has been presented to the United Committee which is free to sell them at the rate of one shilling per dozen, which the Yorkshire League is also doing. Send orders either to 94 Petty France, S.W.1, or to Compton Buildings, Keighley, Yorks.