

"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 PROTECTIONISTS' OPPORTUNITY.

The advocates of a change in our fiscal system, which would involve the imposition of Protectionist customs duties on a comprehensive scale upon goods imported into this country, are looking forward to a fresh burst of activity and a possible realisation of their aims. Great hopes are based on the change in the leadership of their political friends, the Conservative-cum-Unionist Party. The new leader is, in the eyes of the Protectionists, so much more uncompromising, resolute and outspoken than the old, as almost to be reckoned a fanatical and single-minded devotee of their cause. Every Protectionist will have the most thorough-going confidence in him, for, as head of a wealthy and well equipped political organisation, he will give "Tariff Reform" all the official sanction and keen support that the most ardent zealot could wish for. Mr. Balfour's resignation had been the subject of gossip for some time. It was not altogether unexpected, but no one can be surprised that in many quarters it was received with thinly disguised jubilation. Mr. Balfour never was an enthusiast for Protection and he could never be safely regarded as even a friend and sympathiser of the new creed. At best he could only be looked upon as an amiable "nodding acquaintance." With his departure a long internal conflict has come to an end which has resulted in the conversion and capture of a great political party. One by one the Conservative and Unionist Free Traders have been won over or coerced into allegiance to the Birmingham policy. Unkind people will perhaps suggest that Mr. Balfour being too obstinately elusive had to be removed, and if they do, the "Halsbury Club" campaign lends some colour to their view.

The new leader, Mr. Bonar Law, was afforded, immediately after his appointment, a welcome opportunity to start a renewed and vigorous Protectionist agitation under the best auspices. He declared his policy in a speech at the Annual Conference of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations at Leeds on the 16th November. From the Protectionist point of view it was a bold and able statement conveying a challenge to opponents which will have to be met. Little attention was devoted to the Imperial or to the retaliation-against-the-foreigner argument, but much to the unanswerable and abiding facts that unemployment exists, that wealth is unequally distributed, that the inequality is increasing, and that

during the past ten years the position of the working-classes has actually deteriorated. These facts give the Protectionists their real strength in their appeal to the electors and until they are explained by the opponents of Protection, the gravest dangers and disasters face the trade and industry of this country.

The Protectionist explanation has the virtue of plausibility, but what has been called the "orthodox" Free Trader has no explanation to offer at all, except, perhaps, that periodic unemployment is due to sun spots. His organisation, the Free Trade Union, glosses over the facts or accepts them as an unavoidable outcome of a complex modern society, and consoles public audiences with statistics of even greater unemployment, shorter wages and longer hours in certain Protectionist countries. As if it is any consolation to any of the 100,000 railway workers, for instance, who are receiving 20s. a week, to know that in Germany the same man is getting less. If this is all that the Free Trade Union can offer in the way of "glad tidings of great joy" we cannot wonder that thousands of working men, who know and hate their own hard struggle for a livelihood, turn from such cold comfort and vote for Protection.

We leave it to others to expose the fallacies that characterise Mr. Bonar Law's speech and make his remedy so ridiculous. It is never difficult to demonstrate that it is impossible to stop goods from coming into the country and at the same time get revenue by taxing imports, and that it is absurd to suppose that customs duties can in any way alter the distribution of wealth among wage earner, capitalist and landowner. These fallacies and absurdities have been proved over and over again and yet Protection is as strongly supported as ever. But neither Protection nor Free Trade, limited to "taxation for revenue only," can explain why smallholders cannot get land or can offer the unemployed man the numerous opportunities now withheld from him in town, country, village and mine. The idle man is a landless man in every case. His counterpart is the advertisement hoardings defacing the streets of our cities, the rich fields given over to hunting or laid down in permanent pasture, the "building estates" round our towns where no building as yet exists, and the undeveloped mines and quarries. For those who can get work, wages are low. The greater part of the wealth they produce is taken from them by idlers who are privileged to levy an ever increasing toll on their industry.

Both the Protectionist and the orthodox Free Trader run away from these considerations. The Free Trade Union forbids its speakers to refer to them or to show any relation between poverty and the continuance of such injustice. Nothing has to be said in denunciation of the

taxes upon necessary articles of food such as tea, coffee and cocoa, because forsooth these are "revenue taxes." Nothing about the cause of unemployment. Nothing in criticism of the rating system which piles its burdens on all who use land, and restricts production and exchange as viciously as any system of protection could do. As Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman said: "Our present rating system operates as a hostile tariff on our industries." There can be no real Free Trade until we remove the ring fences which surround every village and every great centre of population and shut out the people from their common inheritance.

We have described the Conservative party as the political friends of Protection. Real Free Trade—the complete freeing of industry from all restriction—unfortunately, has not the same prestige among the political opponents of Protection. The Government and its supporters are made up of notoriously diverse elements, some of which are radical enough to urge the removal of every restriction upon trade and every tax and rate upon improvements, but others are reactionary in their attitude toward industrial freedom. The influence of the latter has largely prevailed, and the result has been that Liberal legislation has been marred by many useless and patchwork measures that have neither extended freedom nor curtailed monopoly. Too many so-called Liberals tell us that the Budget of 1909 observed the pledges of the Party to tax land values and we ought now to close down our agitation. The claim is an impertinent one and such men have to make their peace with their own leaders like the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer who, as soon as the valuation is completed, are determined to press on with the taxation of land values for which there is such urgent need. The case was well stated by Mr. Lloyd George himself who, speaking at the annual meeting of the National Liberal Federation at Bath, on the 24th November, said:—

I think the most urgent need of Britain to-day is the regeneration of rural Britain. You will not do that without a complete reform in the land laws. What is happening now? You have got millions of robust citizens driven by the present system from the healthy environment of the soil to the allurements of our great cities. Hundred of thousands, if not millions, passed into other lands. I am not surprised. When the just rewards of labour are given to those who labour not, and where those who do toil are requited with wretched wages and still more wretched houses, you will not keep the labourer on the land.

The complete reform of the land laws, or as we should put it, the Taxation of Land Values and the abolition of taxes upon industry and improvements, is the answer to the challenge of the Protectionists. The Liberals who rest satisfied with the Free Trade Union case, and who condone the internal taxes that cause so much harm, are the worst enemies of Free Trade and are building better than they know for the triumph of Protection. A. W. M.

HOW TO RAISE WAGES WITHOUT STRIKES.

BY W. R. LESTER.

YOU can raise wages by strikes—sometimes. But at best this is an uncertain and hurtful way. As a rule not more than one strike out of four is successful, and even then only at the cost of immense suffering to the men and their families, and injury to the very trades from which both masters and men make their living. The strike is an artificial and barbarous thing.

Are we then to fold our hands helplessly and say that nothing can be done? Most certainly not. There is a means which will not only raise wages with absolute certainty, but which will also help every useful trade. There is a true, a natural, and a lasting way of raising wages.

The way is to free the land—to give agriculturists, builders, and miners, and all other workers freer access to the land.

A small holding of an acre or upwards, according to the position and value of the land, means an addition of at least three shillings to the agricultural labourer's present weekly earnings, provided—and this is all-important—if the land can be got at a fair rent.

This improved position of the labourer would induce many who now flock from the country to the towns to stay in their own villages, and at the same time would enable the countrymen who stayed at home to buy more of those things which are manufactured in the towns.

If countrymen could get the land they so much need on fair terms, we would then have three natural forces at work, each and all making surely for higher wages.

1. Wages would rise in rural districts because it would be easy to get land at fair rents, and therefore fewer men would be seeking to hire themselves out.

2. Wages would rise in the towns because fewer men would be driven from the country to cut down the wages of town workers.

3. Employers would have to seek more workers to supply the increased demand for produce, and this would further assist in raising wages.

The result is sure and certain. Nothing could prevent wages rising of their own accord. Without the machinery of strikes, wages would be bound to rise because employers, finding a larger demand for their products and a smaller supply of labour to draw on, would have to raise the wages in order to induce workers to come to them.

The machinery to free the land is quite simple and is ready to your hand if you like to use it. It is to Tax Land Values: that is, to make every owner of land, pay his rates and taxes on the full value of the bare land; whether he permits it to be fully used, half used, or not used at all. Do not let an owner of land escape his rates and taxes simply because it pleases him to act the dog-in-the-manger by locking up his land or only half using it. At the same time abolish present rates and taxes which burden improvements and the work of men's hands.

This would drive all land to its very best use, and we would no longer see unused or labour-starved land side by side with men who seek work. The present land famine and scarcity of work would be brought to an end, so that all who wanted land could get it at its fair, natural rent. Trade would bound forward, the demand for labour would increase, and wages rise. Employers could raise wages without loss to themselves if they got their land cheaper and were not taxed and rated, as they are at present, on the value of every improvement they make. The present land laws, and the existing system of taxing and rating, keep wages down. The natural and certain way to increase well-being is to Tax Land Values, and so make sure that land can everywhere be got on fair terms by those who want to use it.

To raise wages without strikes—open up land to the agricultural labourer, re-colonise our own country.