

"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.

RURAL LAND REFORM.

Whereas the Protective Tariff was designed to encourage infant industries for a few years until they became established, but has in reality proven to be an instrument of extortion taken advantage of by a few manufacturers to levy tribute on the people of Canada, and has produced Trusts, Combines, and Mergers, by which the cost of living has been greatly enhanced with no corresponding advantage to the public; and whereas the tariff is the most inequitable, unfair, and unjust method of raising the public revenue, as it bears more heavily on the poor than on the rich; and whereas we believe that the interests of the public would be served by absolute freedom of trade; therefore be it resolved that this convention, composed of delegates representing 14,000 farmers of Alberta, places itself on record as in favour of the complete abolition of the Customs Tariff of Canada as soon as possible, and the collection of the public revenues by a direct tax on land values.

And further that we condemn utterly the attempt being made to tax the British workman for the benefit of the Canadian farmer.—*Resolution unanimously adopted on the 21st January, 1913, by the Annual Convention at Calgary of 600 delegates representing the 14,000 United Farmers of Alberta.*

The movement for the Taxation and Rating of Land Values is organised to advocate a complete reform of the methods now resorted to for the raising of public revenues. The reform must be accomplished both in town and country, and be effected both through the taxing machinery of the Government and the rating machinery of local authorities. Its application must be as universal as the evils it seeks to remove, and its benefits must be extended to the producers of wealth in all trades and industry whether carried on in rural or urban areas. The obstacles in the way of unfettered production and a full return to each man for his labour are the withholding of the common inheritance, the land, from its best use and the imposition of taxation upon everything that labour and capital produce.

The existing taxation laws make ownership of land a privileged interest which is able, with profit and advantage, to narrow the field of employment, denude the countryside, and retard the growth and development of every centre of industry. The artificial scarcity of land, although not the outcome

of any conscious combination of landowners, is the most perfect machine that could be devised for keeping the great mass of human society permanently poor and under tribute to those who are privileged to control the use of land. Its essential feature is the denial of the rights of access to natural opportunities, no matter how valuable these may be, to determine arbitrarily where men may live and work, and to drive wages down to a miserable pittance by making every job insecure through the competition of unemployed and landless men. Thus, every increase in wealth-producing power but increases the premium that must be paid for the use of land, raises the value of every natural opportunity whether withheld or not, and leaves the wages of the producers of wealth stationary. To meet these evils and destroy the power of land monopoly it is proposed that the premiums paid for the use of land should be the source of public revenues by taxing and rating the value of the land; making the withholding of land an expense that no landowner could afford to indulge in either for speculation or personal caprice.

But the placing of rates and taxes on the value of land is not only intended to render impossible the artificial scarcity of land; the object is also to remove rates and taxes from industry and its processes so as to give the land-user the fullest encouragement to make the most of his opportunity. Taxation must be transferred to the value of the land so as to obtain for the community what belongs to the community, and leave to the individual his just earnings in every case.

The arguments upon which this principle is based have little opposition to meet with in the towns. There the enormous discrepancy between market value and rateable value, especially of vacant land, has struck the imagination and made the case clear for effective reform. The comparative political freedom of the electorate in the towns has at the same time enabled public opinion to express itself emphatically against the iniquitous tariff that the rates impose upon buildings and improvements, while the land speculator is absolutely immune.

The need for reform on the countryside is no less urgent. There land should be easily obtainable; but the reverse is the case, for high rents rob the producer, and every assessment committee makes the worst use of land a virtue and its cultivation a crime. In the country as well as in the towns the existing law of rating and taxation is the bulwark of landlordism, and the dreadful machine which paralyses progress and reduces the labourer to serfdom. The root of the trouble is universal. There are always two values for land—one value when the landowners are asked to sell or let their land, and another when they are asked to pay rates and taxes. Taxation is remitted when land is held idle, and every encouragement is given to the land monopolist to do as he will with the land he calls his own. So long as the power of vested interest is so protected and safeguarded by the law, such ideas as "fair rent," "fixity of the tenure," and a "just wage" for the men who work the land will continue to be a foolish dream. And it is not sufficient to go to the large towns and declare that the high value of vacant land is the cause of low wages and overcrowding. The land round a village, which, while assessed at a few shillings per acre, can only be had at £40 an acre; the farm land which, while used for sport and assessed at a few pence per acre, can only be had at a prohibitive price for small holdings or farming purposes, constitute as great a national disaster as the withholding of land where population is concentrated into cities.

A typical instance of the present unfair system as it affects rural land has been reported to us from Horsted Keynes, Sussex, where a man has erected three cottages, each on one-sixth of an acre, and the occupiers will in future be assessed for the payment of 38s. 6d. yearly to the rates in respect of each cottage. Near by there are hundreds of acres of land more suitable for cottage sites, but it is assessed for the payment of only 3½d. an acre to the rates, merely because the land, although it is of high value, is put to practically no use. The remedy for this kind of thing—to rate and tax the value of land and exempt cottages and any other expenditure of labour and capital from taxation—would be swift and sure; and it only needs to be stated to appeal as

convincingly to the rural worker as the rating of land values in urban areas has appealed to the town worker.

The absurd contention of prejudiced parties that the Taxation and Rating of Land Values as applied to rural land would be a "burden on agriculture" is being gradually broken down. Opposition that will not listen to argument cannot ignore facts. In Australia and New Zealand the progress made both with local and national Taxation of Land Values has proved that the benefits of the reform are not confined to purely urban land. In Denmark the agitation for the reform is chiefly maintained by 40,000 small landowners. But it is in Western Canada that farmers are making the greatest headway for the carrying out of this great principle. In Alberta and Saskatchewan local taxation will in a few years be concentrated entirely upon the value of the land, both in urban and in rural districts. The demand is now being made for the further extension of the Taxation of Land Values to the collection of national revenues, and our own politicians as well as all those who have the best interests of agriculture at heart should take note of the significant resolution passed on the 21st January by the 600 delegates representing 14,000 Alberta farmers at their Annual Convention in Calgary. These farmers are under no misconception as to the iniquity of taxing either commodities or improvements by means of customs duties or rates and taxes. They call with a unanimous voice for the entire abolition of the Canadian customs tariff and the substitution of that means of taxation by a universal tax on the value of land.

It was Mr. Asquith who recently quoted a resolution passed by the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association repudiating the idea that the Canadian farmers favoured for their own benefit the taxation of British workers, but the Calgary resolution is a far more important message to convey to our people, telling them that the real completion of our Free Trade system lies in the removal of our own remaining customs duties and the abolition of the internal tariff, which assessment committees are every day imposing upon the homes, the workshops, and the enterprise of all who put labour and capital into the land.

A. W. M.