

LAND VALUES

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"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 STRIKES, SHORTER HOURS AND UNEMPLOYMENT.

As we go to Press the papers are full of accounts of strikes and threats of strikes. The upheaval is widespread. In Belfast and on the Clyde there is a general deadlock which began in the shipyards and has caused the hold up of the public services. Disorder and riot have intervened, and at the instance of the authorities the military are parading the streets of Glasgow. In London the motor-men on the Tube railways are out and no local trains are running. The Electrical Trades Union has launched an ultimatum at the Government demanding immediate legislation for a national 40-hour week, and the penalty is the cutting off of power and light in London. The railwaymen, engineers, ship-builders, and vehicle workers are in a ferment and may take national action if there is no satisfactory outcome of negotiations now pending. The strike fever spreads to numerous trades, and as the stoppage of one compels others to stop who are not parties in the strife, a general disorganisation of industry is gravely menaced. The objects aimed at are not in all cases the same. But the ostensible reason for the movement in the larger centres of population and among the most representative trades is to reduce the hours of labour. Not long ago a 47 hour week was made the standard in several of the trades now on strike. In Belfast the demand was at first for 44 hours, but that has been altered to 40 hours, upon which the strikers for shorter hours in Glasgow and London are agreed.

The present industrial temper is one of irritation and anger at the thought of coming unemployment. The conviction grows that hard times are ahead. The strikes express the mood of resentment

at such a prospect, and men wish to counter it beforehand if they can. Meanwhile demobilisation proceeds apace. War work conducted by borrowed funds has closed down. The financial screw is being twisted to squeeze out of industry the many millions so lavishly advanced. The landed and the moneyed interests are set on securing even greater spoils than they have gathered during the war. Action is called for to avert industrial warfare born of discontent. Turmoil and chaos may ensue if sound remedies are not speedily applied. The stage has not yet been reached when many men are looking for work that cannot be found. But they are coming and their name is legion. They will not lightly suffer the disappointment of opportunities denied or hear it said that this country has no place for them.

What steps are being taken? The Government vacillate between inactivity and intimidation when any protest or warning is uttered. One responsible party blames the other responsible party. Labour leaders exploit the present agitation to promote ridiculous schemes and advise and exhort men to go on strike for remedies that will not work. The most plausible of all is that which asserts that more employment will be available if shorter hours are worked. This wholly fallacious doctrine, for the sake of which men are encouraged to cause untold suffering to themselves and countless others, is being stated in resolutions and applauded by those whose first gibe at the statesmen is that they are blind leaders of the blind. Mr. Philip Snowden, writing in the *LABOUR LEADER* of January 30th, declares that: "The demand for a reduction in the hours of labour is due to a sound instinct on the part of the workmen. They expect, and rightly expect, that before long, there will be serious and widespread unemployment unless drastic steps are taken now to prevent this. A reduction in the hours of labour is the most efficacious method capable of immediate adoption for minimising the evil of unemployment."

Certainly, if this is the cure and if combined action could enforce it, there could be no better opportunity than the present to establish new contracts. In spite of the migration from the ranks and the war factories, labour is still scarce enough to insist on such relations with employers as will seem to insure against future distress. It may soon be too late to act; for when there is a crowd at the gate ready to take a job rather than starve, no demands for improved conditions will be listened to and no strike will succeed. Idle hands are far more effective strike-breakers than posted sentinels or mounted machine-guns. All this is seen and realised, and it is made the point of the argument by those who put their faith in collective bargaining followed by direct action. They have found, so they think, the cure for unemployment, and at the cost of the loss and bitterness

which every strike engenders they mean to make the pace for its application.

The compulsory reduction of hours of labour universally observed and without any reduction in wages is advocated, not merely for its own sake as a desirable reform, but also as a social remedy which will absorb men who are out of work. Logically, the case as set forth by its votaries amounts to this: the more unemployment there is, the shorter the hours should be, no matter what is the actual productive capacity of any industry. The fact is overlooked that under compulsion to work no longer than a given time, some occupations must close down. The immediate effect would be the dismissal of men from all concerns which can only just manage to meet existing competition. It would lead to the still greater concentration of capital in the hands of the few, with still greater power on their part to take or reject men as they chose.

But sentiment is directed along these mischievous and suicidal channels. The weapon of the strike, aimed without thought of the real cause of oppression, rebounds on those who use it. Arguments are inverted and the end is confused with the means. It is as if nothing had ever been heard of the fences monopoly has erected against all those avenues to employment which lie outside the gates of existing works and factories. Shorter hours will not make for greater employment nor for increased opportunities. But increased opportunities will make for shorter hours and better conditions all round.

These Labour leaders, so called, delude their followers into the belief that there is nothing for the unemployed, nothing for the man at the gate except a share in such work as is available now. He is to get that at the expense either of the employer's "surplus," if the surplus is large enough; if not, then at the expense of other men's wages, or at the expense of all the taxpayers including the worker himself. They deny the importance of the land question or that there is any relationship between wages and rent—that wages will naturally fall to subsistence level, and that there must be unemployment if the original source of all wealth is a close monopoly. They discard the limitless field of employment which nature offers to man. Consciously or unconsciously they are beset by the obsolete, reactionary doctrine that there is a limited wage-fund and an equally limited work-fund, both in the hands of the capitalist employer. With that narrow vision they can only try one hopeless experiment after another, travelling always in a vicious circle—as long as those most concerned are willing to be the corpse and to submit to repeated disappointment and disillusionment.

It is as we have said from the beginning: after the war there would be the menace of unemployment. Legislators instead of being prepared for that problem have imagined that they did their

duty in appointing Reconstruction Committees to fit men into the jobs that were waiting for them. They did not reckon with the power of monopoly to hold land out of use; or if they did, they made the landlord's right to rent the key-stone of their edifice. Upon that everything else rests and depends, and their Joint Industrial Councils remain but castles in the air. Neither they nor the Labour leaders had any plan for setting free the idle acres for idle hands, making room for all, liberating the towns from the landowners' price so that industry and art might flourish, and giving access to all the sources of raw material. The men at the gate need not be there if these opportunities were available. Land monopoly, and that alone, drives them there.

A. W. M.

GREAT ESTATES SOLD

£14,000,000 of Property Changes Hands this Year.

Many great estates have changed hands this year. The Duke of Bedford has been again one of the largest sellers. Part of his Bedfordshire estate was at first sold privately, and 5,000 acres was afterwards resold for £126,000. During the year £14,000,000 is the approximate estimate of the total realisations.

Among the most important estates that have been broken up, the editor of the *ESTATES GAZETTE* recalled yesterday, were Lord Stalbridge's in Dorset, 8,000 acres, including the town of Shaftesbury, sold for £462,000; the Alton estate in Staffordshire, 5,500 acres, £196,000; the Duke of Sutherland's Scottish estates, £201,000; Gopsall Hall, one of the stately homes of England, 12,000 acres, purchased by Mr. S. J. Waring for nearly half a million; the Earl of Pembroke's estate in Wiltshire, 8,400 acres, £112,000; the Broome and Harcott estates of the Earl of Dudley, 3,200 acres, £121,000; the Duke of Buccleuch's Warwickshire estate, 3,800 acres, £150,000; and Lord Anglesey's estate at Burton-on-Trent, 3,000 acres, £152,000.

Then there were 6,700 acres of the Eaton estate of the Duke of Westminster, sold privately; the Lentworth Hall estate, near Lancaster, also sold privately; Lord Crewe's Spurstow estate, near Beeston Castle, Notts, 2,300 acres, £34,600; 1,800 acres of Sir Robert Peel's estate in Staffordshire, £80,000; the historic Bosworth Park estate, 2,000 acres, £88,000.

Amongst notable buyers of the year was Lord Leverhulme, who purchased for £450,000 the island of Lewis.—"*Daily News*" (London), December 31st.

Mr. Alfred Elson, Springfield, Cropston, Leicestershire, writes to the *WESTMINSTER GAZETTE* of January 20th: "A few weeks back I went to look at a small holding, with a view to purchasing for my son, who wishes for outdoor employment, as we live in the country. There was only what I considered a poor house and 27½ acres, but the agent modestly asked £1,800 for it, although it was at present let at £60 per year. If this is to be the conception of full market value, then smallholders with millstones of mortgages round their necks will have their doom sealed at the outset. If a policy of exploiting the Corn Production Bill, or the necessities of the peoples, is persisted in, it can only lead to the discontent and ruin of many smallholders."