

MR. ASHLEY MITCHELL ON LIBERTY VERSUS PLANNING

The first Annual General Meeting of the re-formed Clitheroe (Lancashire) Liberal Association was held on June 19th. After the business meeting a public meeting was addressed by Mr. Ashley Mitchell, of Huddersfield, his speech being extensively reported in the *Borough Record* and in the *Clitheroe Advertiser*.

Mr. MITCHELL said:

"At all times, but more especially in this period of confusion, it is desirable for Liberals to remember and stress the basis of their faith. A dictionary says 'Liberalism is that which makes for liberty.' There have been many classical definitions, the most famous: 'All men have an equal right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.' Campbell Bannerman said: 'Good government is no substitute for self-government.' Lowell said: 'Before man made us citizens, great nature made us men.' It can also be added that liberty for all requires that no one shall enjoy privilege at the expense of his fellows.

"The equal right to life requires that all shall have equal access to use the bounty provided by nature, that no man is morally entitled to charge others for use of the earth provided for all. Land is necessary for all existence; the activities of the whole community give a value to land, apart from any improvements put on it; the value of the bare land belongs of right to the community. The Liberal and Labour parties have long been pledged to collect that value by taxation and rating of land values. Philip Snowden put a measure for that purpose on the Statute Book, which the Tories suspended before it could operate, and soon after repealed it.

"The first business of this Parliament should have been to restore that measure, or a better one, but under the influence of war-time methods, it is now fashionable in politics to put everything into measures of planning, forgetting the axiom about self-government, with the result that we now see the fundamental problem of the land being mishandled by the proposals of the Town and Country Planning Bill.

THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING BILL

"The Conservative leader in the House of Lords, the Marquess of Salisbury, speaking in the second reading debate on the Bill, said he found nothing to enthuse about, and he did not think many people knew what was in it. That statement well describes what is happening—that the Government is rushing a measure through Parliament that has not been adequately discussed and that most people are unaware of the reactionary policy contained in the Bill.

"Supporters of the present Government would claim that being a Labour Government, it can be described as progressive, but consideration of this Bill shows a tenderness to the landed interest truly in succession to the acts of their reactionary predecessors, and makes a mockery of their claim to the title of progressive. The Bill contains provisions for grants to landowners of hundreds of millions of pounds for community created values of land. For the right to future development taken over by the State, the landowners are to receive £300 millions, but all values of existing use of land are guaranteed to the present owners, and all future increases of value of such existing use.

"Thus the nation is to be deprived of a source of revenue that has been neglected too long, a revenue that would have allowed the existing burdens of tariffs, purchase taxes and income tax to have been reduced. Such a policy is surely the mark of a reactionary Government.

"The Bill also contains proposals to enable local authorities to purchase large parcels of town land. Originally it was proposed to pay only the 1939 value, and for that purpose it was stated that £600 millions would be available.* The Bill has been altered in committee (as was inevitable, because the 1939 basis was impossible) to pay current values, which will make the

*£600 millions was the amount estimated by acquiring and redeveloping blitzed and blighted areas. In addition the Bill commits Parliament to vast expenditure of public money on land purchase for various schemes.

total for that purpose far exceed £600 millions, so with that commits Parliament to vast expenditures of public money on land almost unlimited liability, it can be seen that with the £300 millions for the development rights, added to the land purchase schemes, many more than £1,000 millions are to be granted to the landowners, but if a tax on land values had first been instituted, the value of land would have been reduced, so that any pieces of land that needed to be taken over by the local authorities could have been secured for reasonable prices.

"Under the measure, all town planning is to be subject to the approval of the Ministry, so further reducing the liberty of local authorities, all development is to be made subject to a charge that will be merely a further barrier to the building of houses and development of property, so making for unemployment.

"The similarity of this measure to the early acts of the National Socialists in Germany is very striking. There the Junkers were mollified with tremendous subsidies, while power was concentrated in the central government.

"Fashions run in politics, as in other spheres: now it is fashionable to describe planning by the State as progress; so the Socialists press this measure forward. The Liberal Party, affected by the same influence, give it support; the Tory Party stated their only objection, now removed, was that the compensation was not adequate. With the national finances in their present conditions such proposals to grant untold millions to vested interests can only be described by the old Latin saying: 'Whom the Gods wish to destroy they first drive mad.'

FREE TRADE

"The first need of the world now is for assured peace. In 1941 the Atlantic Charter was published. People then felt that when the terrible enemy was defeated and the war over, trade would be allowed to flow freely all over the world; goods would be exchanged for goods, the bounteous plenty of one country would be traded for that of another, so food and all supplies would be plentiful, animosities would fade and peace be secured through freedom of trade. Instead, we hear talk of tariff bargains, threats of increased tariffs, exchange and other controls maintained, free markets abolished and peace threatened again. Liberals can have no truck with tariffs; we should press the campaign for free trade for this country, whatever other countries may do. Tariffs are only a privilege granted to some people to charge their fellow countrymen higher prices, and so deprive their fellow citizens of the plenty of other countries. It is pathetic to see Ministers who refuse to adopt free trade giving the public elementary lessons that imports are paid for by exports."

MISS ELIZABETH RILEY, of British Columbia, also gave a short address. She declared she could not understand anyone taking part in politics without the knowledge of fundamental economics. The two were inseparable. It was only by the knowledge of political economy that the people became able to efficiently govern themselves.

Mr. W. SHACKLETON, the Divisional Secretary, endorsed all that Mr. Mitchell had said, and contended that the pernicious purchase taxes could well be replaced by the taxation of land values.

Credit for the success of this meeting goes primarily to Mrs. F. G. Sumner, the Hon. Organiser of the Association, of which she is also temporary joint Hon. Secretary with Mr. Hugh Williams. President is Mr. C. J. Hemelryk; Treasurer, Mr. W. G. Mooreg; Secretary, Mrs. Mooreg.

MR. ASHLEY MITCHELL, with Mrs. and Miss Mitchell, sailed from Liverpool on July 2nd, on a business visit to Canada and the U.S.A. His itinerary includes Montreal, Toronto and New York for a week's or a fortnight's stay in each place and he looks forward to meeting many members and friends of the International Union. A special engagement has been made for him to address the Henry George birthday celebration in Chicago, September 2nd.

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