

## CORRESPONDENCE

## FREEDOM OF THE SEAS—AND OF THE LAND

To the Editor, *Land & Liberty*,

SIR,

The subject of the Freedom of the Seas is at last being discussed in the open. For years the question has remained in the background of all international relations, and especially of the relations of Great Britain with the United States of America. Politicians and diplomatists have been afraid to touch it; statesmen have tried to ignore it. It is an open secret that the last Conference on Naval Disarmament wrecked itself on this barren shore. World politics are vitiated and endangered by this problem, more perhaps than by any other point of difference. Necessity has forced it to the forefront of international discussion, and the time is ripe for a solution.

Bereft of its complexities the issue may be briefly summarized. This country's naval policy, ever since it became a naval power, has been and still is, based on the right in time of war to stop and search and, if need be, capture mercantile shipping, whether enemy or neutral. This is the traditional Admiralty claim which successive Cabinets have maintained, in theory and in practice. The claim is justified on the ground that it constitutes the most vital and powerful weapon which can be wielded by a country situated as this one is. It is the weapon of the blockade, which has proved so terribly effective in the past, when used against an enemy nation.

The claim of Great Britain to control the seas and interfere according to the dictates of her own interest with neutral commerce has never been acknowledged by other powers. The United States, in particular, challenges the claim and takes up the contention for the freedom of the seas on behalf not only of itself, but of the world. Persistence in the British point of view threatens to bring upon our country isolation and estrangement and the imminence of war. What moves our Admiralty to cling to such a two-edged sword?

It would appear that our faith in the blockade weapon has an anticipatory and apprehensive origin. Knowing the liability and vulnerability of an island nation to be blockaded into submission, our naval authorities go upon the principle of getting their blow in first. Reluctance to give up the blockade right, and to assent to international guarantees of open sea routes, is in fact, an unconscious admission of the weakness of this country's position. We hesitate to fling away the right of capture although our interests as world traders demands open sea roads more than any other country. Fear overrides common-sense and self-interest. The fear is that the blockade weapon might be turned against us, despite international guarantees, and find us deprived of retaliatory powers.

Considerations along this line bring us inevitably to the land question. Why should we be so helplessly dependent on overseas trade routes as to force us to alienate the friendship of the world? Simply because we insist, as a nation, on clinging to certain shibboleths regarding our internal conditions. We listen, as if under a charm, to those who tell us that our own land with our own labour will not and cannot produce our sufficiencies. Let authorities like Kropotkin, Prof. James Long and others, give copious proofs of the abundant food-producing capacities of our land; it matters not, we pay no heed. Let the facts stare us in the face that our countryside has in the past maintained a teeming population, and that millions of acres now lie fallow that once grew food. Let other

communities show us what can be done with less fertile soil and less favourable general conditions. We still seem to prefer to import inferior foodstuffs and pay millions in taxation to maintain an overwhelming fleet necessitated by our naval policy of the right of capture.

It comes to this, that rather than effect a reversal of our land system by the abolition of privilege and monopoly; our rulers consider it easier to flout the opinion of the world, to risk the enmity of America, and to maintain the crushing load of naval taxation which weighs us down.

Freedom of the seas is bound up with freedom of the land. The Taxation of Land Values is the true international policy. It would, by opening up the land at home, bring a feeling of greater security and of less dependence upon imported supplies. Foreign and colonial trade would become settled on new terms, with internationally guaranteed freedom of sea routes, and a great reduction in the necessary naval establishments of every nation, including our own.

World politics require world vision. The leaders of the world must learn to see how one problem is linked with another. Just as international free trade cannot be made effective apart from a free land system, free from the land monopoly, so the vexed questions of naval relations have their connection with the soil. The genius of Henry George covers these questions also, and in the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade we have the effective expression of his message on international peace, freedom and justice.

Yours, etc., D. J. J. OWEN.

FROM ONE LIBERAL TO ANOTHER.—An eminent member of the Liberal Party (sending us copy of his letter) wrote as follows on 2nd February to the local Federation offices: "At our Conference on Thursday no reference was made to what in my opinion would be the most effective remedy for unemployment, the provision of houses and promotion of industry, viz., the removal of the burden of rates and taxes from all buildings and other improvements created by individual effort, and placing it upon site values, which are created by the presence and industry of the community. The Liberal Party has been pledged to this policy for many years, and in my opinion the present unfortunate position of the Party is very largely due to lack of courage of the leaders of the Party in not tackling the question boldly. I feel sure this has driven many of our keenest supporters in the past into the ranks of Labour." \* \* \*

A valued correspondent who is a manufacturer in a large way in Scotland writes to *Land & Liberty*: "I presume de-rating will apply to our factories. I find that it would mean a saving of about £700. I had this worked out to see how much per yard of our output it would mean, and found that it came to about one-fifth of a penny per yard, double width. Of course this would not enable us to reduce the price to our customers, sell any more, or give more employment. What a farce!"

### Significant Paragraphs From "Progress and Poverty"

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