

# Political and Economic Freedom in Great Britain

By DOUGLAS J. J. OWEN

WHILST the military struggle to preserve political liberty gathers momentum, the political struggle to extend liberty to the economic sphere hangs fire, and in Great Britain it is almost entirely suspended. Under the truce between the three main political parties any agitation for the redress of economic grievances is regarded as unpatriotic and a hindrance to the war effort. It is not realized or admitted that to remove injustices is to remove those causes of friction which are the real obstacles to national unity. Recent speeches by Labor leaders and others, which outline a new and better social order after the war, have been criticized by Right Wing spokesmen as a breach of the party truce. The hope of a juster and freer system, which is the chief incentive to continued endurance by the people, is discouraged and discounted already. At the same time, ancient monopolies like landlordism take advantage of the fact that the progressive parties are not pressing their economic objectives. Party activity is suspended, though the Conservative Party retains its huge majority in Parliament. There is talk of a continuance of the truce after the war and a more or less indefinite postponement of any General Election. This inactivity seems to be the cause of a great decline in membership and subscriptions of the official Labor Party as distinct from the Trade Union movement.

In spite, however, of the political truce, a measure of economic freedom has been enjoyed for a time by certain classes of workers. The great demand for skilled labor in war production gave a new power of individual bargaining not hitherto enjoyed by operatives and economic power greater than that usually achieved by trade union or strike methods. The much despised and misunderstood law of demand and supply for once worked in favor of the worker and caused a higher wage level and a greater mobility of labor. Ordinarily men and women could for once pick and choose their jobs and determine to a large extent what their earnings should be. This was not everywhere the case, but it was an indication of what happens when there are more openings for willing workers than there are workers to fill them. It showed also that the wage-slave status can be removed by economic means without political violence. The lesson plainly is that such political power as men have must be used to achieve this free economic status as a permanency; and that, of course, means the freeing of all the natural resources of the earth from monopoly so as to create innumerable opportunities for employment.

The brief spell of economic liberty, and the higher wages resulting, are now being checked by various forms of industrial compulsion under cover of the party truce. The

mobility of labor is no longer allowed to flow freely along the economic channels of the best reward, but is being canalized by bureaucratic direction. Men and women workers must now go where they are sent, stay where they are put, and take what they are given. Lord Halifax in his recent great speech condemned Hitler's "New Order" because it "involves the shackling of industry and commerce, ruthless compulsion in place of free contract." This "compulsion in place of free contract" is being justified in Great Britain as a factor in the struggle to maintain political liberties. The tragedy in the past has been that the workers in every country have not known what to do with political franchises when won, and have largely failed to use them as the means to win full economic emancipation.

An interesting light is thrown on the present state compulsion of industry by the terms of the manifesto of Church leaders which was referred to in our previous article, in the March-April issue of *LAND AND FREEDOM*. Related to the principle that the earth's resources should be used for the benefit of all, there was the further point that "the sense of a Divine vocation must be restored to man's daily work." This principle that a man's work should be undertaken because he believes it to be his "calling" and the divine purpose of his life, is a noble vision. It lifts all human labor to a higher plane. One wonders, however, if the high ecclesiastical dignitaries have grasped its far-reaching implications. It cannot be reconciled with the checking of economic processes by industrial conscription.

History warns us that whilst struggling for religious and political freedom men may find they have lost their economic freedom and with it all the real fruits of their religious and political sacrifices. Examples enough are provided in British history. Now that world federation is being everywhere discussed, the lessons of the "federation of Great Britain" should not be missed. Scottish people rightly boast that the Union was consummated, not by conquest, but by dynastic and political factors. The land laws of England and Scotland are distinct in many ways, and Scotland enjoys a considerable measure of independence. In the struggle for religious freedom Scotland has a proud record. It is significant, in fact, how much of the history of the Reformation is bound up with economic and social revolt. But, whilst Scotland was splitting up into so many sects, the landowners were allowed to walk off with the people's liberties. The Scots thought that, in their fierce religious disputes and the contest between the Free and the Established Churches, they were preserving their souls, whilst all the time the land was being taken from under their feet. Trying to make peace with the Lord above they were being starved by the Lords below.

Scotland became a "Forbidden Land," as a review of a book by Dr. E. A. Baker under that title, in the March *Land & Liberty*, shows. The Highland clearances went on parallel with the long struggles which won Scottish political and religious freedom.

When, in 1843, the Scottish Free Church disestablished and disendowed itself, and over 400 ministers came out of the State Church and were looking for new sites of land to carry on divine worship, we read that land was refused them all over the country, the chief offenders being the Dukes of Buccleuch and Sutherland.

In Froude's "Carlyle" will be found the story of "Jenny Fraser versus the Duke of Buccleuch." When the Duke heard that Jenny was about to bequeath to the Free Church her "Naboth's vineyard," the only patch he did not control in the Parish of Penpont, he sent his agent to bid any money for the plot. His offers mounted rapidly. But in Carlyle's words, "Jenny is deaf as whinstone though poor nearly as Job; she answers always, 'I got it from the Lord, and I will give it to the Lord.'" The garden patch was too small for the purpose, the wall had to be tapered on one side, and the bend is still called the "Duke's Elbow."

Such is the relation of a free land system to freedom of conscience and of worship!

We are slow to learn that there can be no complete liberty in political or religious life if men are economically in chains. We are all "beleaguered" today, for such is the true interpretation of our present system which allows land-withholding for speculative purposes. As effectively as any enemy draws his U boat or E boat cordon around his blockaded or besieged town or territory, so does this land monopoly encircle us now. We shall learn this again when the war is over, for no business can start or restart unless it is willing to come to terms with those who today are buying land for "investment purposes." The door of industry is bolted and barred, and it is double-locked by the vicious forms of taxation which the State and the municipality will at once impose upon any who try to turn the key in the lock.

There can be no truce with this iniquity, whatever the British political parties agree upon. It is therefore gratifying to report that a Memorandum signed by twenty-four M.P.'s has been submitted to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging him to put into operation a tax on land value. Following this up, a deputation comprising Messrs. Wedgwood, Glenvil Hall, R. R. Stokes, and F. C. R. Douglas was received by the Financial Secretary on February 19. The hopes, however, that their strong representations might have some effect have not been fulfilled. There is no reference to Land Values in the new Budget. No notice is taken of the cogent arguments put forth in the Memorandum, which is reported in full in *Land & Liberty* for March. One of its paragraphs is as follows: "The whole wealth of this

country is, in the end, the product of its land and the labor of its people, or derived from exchanging that product for the products of other countries. There need be no unemployment and no enforced poverty arising therefrom if all the natural resources are put to their fullest and best use. The most far-reaching, effective and continuous method of assuring that land is fully utilized is to require payment of a tax on its site value, whether it is used or unused."

[Mr. Owen promises in his next article to analyze the Budget proposals and the discussions thereon.—Ed.]

## The Country of the Future

By JOSEPH DANA MILLER

SOMEWHERE in time remote and far  
 The boundaries of that country reach  
 From Southern seas to Polar star,  
 To all who are of human speech.  
 What matter medleys strange of tongue  
 Where smiles are language—where they tell  
 Their story to a world grown young  
 Of Love at last made audible.

How gloriously bounded then,  
 The Land that craves not War's renown—  
 Eastward by love of yellow men,  
 and northward by the love of brown.  
 Bounded by love of all men East,  
 And by the love of all men West,  
 The arms of highest and the least  
 Are shields about their breast.

No Hun or Vandal horde prevails  
 O'er land where serfs are not, nor lords,  
 Though here are playgrounds that were jails,  
 And plowshares that were swords.  
 Nor eye their boundary descries  
 Who flung from them all vulgar fears,  
 Nor are the slopes of Paradise  
 Wider than their frontiers!

God waits upon that people—they  
 Who find their soul what time they choose,  
 And gain their glory on the day  
 They their dominions lose.  
 God waits them—from His templed cloud  
 He seeks them with a patient eye—  
 The people who, no longer proud,  
 Build empires in the sky!