

"ALL WE LIKE SHEEP"—LIBERALS AT OXFORD

CITIZENS of independent spirit, who desire neither to exploit nor to be exploited, and who find themselves gradually taxed to the point of extermination, may be tempted to take a too 'dingy-minded' view of the future, as the chief tax-gatherer suggested the other day; but this does not alter the fact that the Jeremiahs, though always derided, have sometimes proved correct. Many thoughtful citizens, by no means given to unreasonable gloom, are as disturbed by the Socialism of the Opposition parties as by that of the present Government and look for hopeful signs, not so much in partisan exchanges, as in the views of any young people who might lead the political reformation we so badly need. In this search they might turn to the *Statement of Policy* recently issued by the Oxford University Liberal Club in preparation for the discussions of the Liberal Party at its annual assembly.

Although only the first part of this Statement has been completed, its scope and general tone, especially on the economic side, are sufficient to enable any attentive reader to judge the whole. The design is evidently to define principles—entitled *Morals, Economics and Politics*—and thence formulate policy under the headings of Foreign Policy, International Trade, Full Employment, Incentives, Taxation Reform and Nationalisation. On closer examination, however, one cannot help suspecting that the authors, having accepted the contentions of Lord Beveridge's curiously named book, *Full Employment in a Free Society*, built up their case not objectively but resolved to admit nothing in conflict with the Beveridge proposals.

Under 'Morals' we are told, as 'Principle 1', that 'where the advantage of an individual conflicts seriously with the public advantage, the latter must be paramount.' This seems obvious until we read, under 'Politics', that 'the fruits of an individual's production (i.e., his personal property) should accrue to him' but, *because of Principle 1*, 'the ownership of property is not an absolute but a qualified right.'

The Statement therefore starts from the fundamental assumption that an individual by merely producing for himself can somehow injure others and it ignores altogether the distinction between natural property and legal property—which may and often does mean the legalized power to appropriate the fruits of another's production. This is no firm ground on which to build a sound policy but it is a suitable atmosphere for the introduction of proposals based on arbitrary power.

The section entitled 'Economics' yields no information on these matters. It is, in fact, so brief that it may be quoted in full: 'Having to eat to live, and to work to eat, the individual finds that he has a dual economic function in society: he must be (a) a producer, and (b) a consumer. He decides that, if he has to give up one or the other function, he would rather give up producing. Knowing now that the function which is more vital to him is consuming, he decides that it is from this point of view that he must judge all his economic relations with society, remembering that in the ultimate analysis his producing is slave to his consuming.'

The tendency of this section is to suggest that, if the State will keep you, you need not bother about freedom to keep yourself; but many readers will surely be surprised to know that this is considered by a club of educated young men an adequate statement of economic law on which to base the policy of a great party. We know that ignorance of the mechanism of price level and exchange rate, and of the factors in the production and distribution of wealth has led to that error which has long been considered the antithesis of liberal doctrine: various forms of the assumption that the gain of one individual, class or nation, under free conditions, must be at the expense of others. Liberal leaders have sometimes denounced these errors in their opponents. Has young Oxford repudiated these denunciations? Is it now taboo there to study Adam Smith and Ricardo?

The policy which follows from these definitions of principle does not differ very much except in name from that of any other party influenced by the current drift towards collectivist ideas. Foreign nations are not to be left to work out their own destiny but to be dominated by a World Government. The causes of war are assumed to be the wickedness of dictators, newspaper owners, capitalist armament profiteers, etc., insufficient armaments in the hands of the 'right' people, aggressive economic policies, over-population and malnutrition. It seems to be assumed (with Malthus) that over-population is linked with malnutrition; it is to be solved by World Boards distributing food 'as it is needed.'

The Statement condemns Protective Tariffs and exclusive trade agreements but implies that they cannot be abolished except by international agreement and investment control and national currency restrictions, quotas and price control. This 'free trade policy' (!) must be limited to countries fulfilling certain conditions including an internal policy of 'stabilised full employment' and a continuity in tariffs and quotas. If only Joseph Chamberlain's ghost would give us his comments on the party which once accused him of advocating restrictions on trade!

According to the Statement, a policy of 'uncontrolled free trade' would result in depreciation of British currency abroad and the importation of foreign goods while 'we could not be certain' that all our exports would find markets abroad. It is implied that the foreigners would send us manufactured goods (for nothing) but not raw materials; so that the rich would live well 'at the expense of an army of unemployed'. It seems that during all the generations of controversy on this subject the Conservative Party's arguments were sound and the Liberal Party's policy mistaken.

The proposals on 'Full Employment' are identical with those of Lord Beveridge's book, already reviewed in the pages of this journal. Even the phraseology is repeated. The 'national outlay' is to be controlled by the Economic General Staff exercising arbitrary and almost unlimited powers over the economic life of our citizens, these powers being described always in such disarming terms as 'assume responsibility for wage levels' when the only meaning can be 'control wages'. This General Staff will of course impose taxes—especially Purchase Tax—and it will incur deficits 'when necessary'. It will also control propaganda to promote that 'sense of compelling common purpose' which will be the incentive to work in this Liberal-not-Socialist world. No attempt is made to prove the theory which is advanced to justify these powers or to examine the operation of existing monopoly on the question of unemployment. Monopoly, in fact, does not seem to conflict with the principles of these modern Liberals; State monopoly is only 'a question of convenience' and private monopolies which do not 'abuse their power by fixing immoderately high prices' are to be allowed.

Some lovers of Oxford might be disappointed to note the facile acceptance of alien ideas which this document reveals. One regrets that a Schumacher can dominate so easily the successors of John Locke, and that distortion of the meaning of words can be practised so easily where Whately taught intellectual integrity. There are few signs of that chivalrous consideration for the feelings and lives of others which chafes at any coercive solution; on the contrary there is evidence of a reluctance to explore libertarian proposals.

But perhaps we attribute too much to this document. It may not be unanimous; it cannot be final. Gladstone, looking back on his Christchurch days, remarked: 'Oxford had rather tended to hide from me that great fact that liberty is a great and precious gift of God, and that human excellence cannot grow up in a nation without it,' but he goes on to say that 'the single-minded

and passionate love of truth' with which the university inspired him had even then 'laid the foundations of his liberalism.' This spirit cannot have been entirely extinguished. Gladstone, we know, never had the vision of free trade in all its fullness. He lopped only the branches of that 'spirit of organised monopoly' which he recognised as his deadliest foe and for that reason lived to regret the growing socialism within his party as it turned to paternalism in its decline. But his career demonstrates beyond question the only atmosphere in which political liberalism can flourish: the recognition that national honesty is no more than individual honesty, involving the scrupulous balancing of budgets, the strictest economy in public expenditure, the abolition of concealed taxation, of monopolies, tariffs and all official restrictions on the operations of production; and a free market. Principle always, expedience never, must govern Acts of Parliament.

Oxford Liberals need not go very far back in their own records for precedents if they will investigate chances of reviving this spirit. In July, 1939, the Union of University Liberal Associations at Edinburgh adopted unanimously a resolution calling for the taxation and rating of land values and for free trade. Only 'through the liberation of the people from the exactions both of the land monopolists and the tax gatherers' could the supporters of that resolution 'see any solution of the problems of poverty and unemployment.'

Oxford Liberals may now reject this resolution, as they reject the spirit of Gladstonian liberalism and the economic principles of every Prime Minister in a Liberal government. But surely they need to give better reasons than they have shown in their *Statement of Policy*.

F.D.P.

ANNA GEORGE DE MILLE

Anna George was the youngest and only survivor of the four children of Henry George. In the family were Jennie, the eldest, who died before her father at the early age of thirty; Henry, the author and Congressman and biographer of his father; and Richard, the sculptor, by whose hand were many works including the bust of his father and the impressive tombstone at the Greenwood Cemetery. Anna's childhood visits to Great Britain were in company with her mother and sister Jennie, in her father's lecture tours of 1881 and 1889. After her marriage she settled in California. Her next visit to this country, prelude to many more, was in 1925. By that time she had taken her place in the 'front firing line' (as Mr. Lester put it at her reception in London) of the Henry George movement and had much valuable service to her credit. She was passionately devoted to what her father taught but her ardent desire was to be honoured as a worker in the cause, joining the ranks wholly in that capacity for, as she so often said, she knew and had to contend with the prestige which was apt to be bestowed on her on account of her parentage. She had to deserve more than that. We can recall her words at the reception—that she would not have lived in vain if someone, some day, somewhere, would say of her she had lighted a candle at her father's torch; it was as a disciple that she wished to speak because although possibly a creed or dogma could be handed down from father to child—the child was apt to swallow it whole without study—religion each soul had to find for itself and their great principle which they knew by its advantages was her religion; she had to work to find it, and to study and seek just like other disciples.

"Well done thou good and faithful servant" are words which now echo back to her; and having achieved her ambition to stand forth worthily, proving her title by the testimony of her acts, she has richly earned the loving respect and gratitude of all her fellows. Many there be who cherish her memory, in America by her widespread and tireless activities, in Great Britain by her frequent visits, in Denmark which to her was almost a second country of adoption, in many countries through

the International Union and its Conferences, and over most of the world by her assiduous correspondence. But her closest associates in New York will miss her most, those of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation and the Henry George School of Social Science in particular, in whose work for the past number of years she had taken a leading part. To have seen the School flourish, acquiring its fine building and firmly established with almost university status, was a consummation dear to her heart's desire. Her own chief contribution to the literature of the movement, excellently done, was only just completed before her death. The work has been appearing by instalments in the quarterly *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, a new life of her father entitled *Henry George, World Citizen*. Those who have read the instalments are eager not only to have the published book but also to assist in its deservedly wide circulation.

On March 20th, Anna George was laid to rest in the family grave in the Greenwood Cemetery, Brooklyn. The Memorial service was held in the Riverside Church, New York. About 170 mourners were present, a few of them having attended Henry George's funeral half a century before. Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick conducted the service paying a high tribute to Anna and Judge Samuel Seabury read passages from *Progress and Poverty*. We convey again our sincere sympathy to Anna George's daughters Agnes and Margaret and the whole family circle in their bereavement.

SOUTH AFRICAN POTATOES

The Star, Johannesburg, February 11, reports:

Consumers will pay less, and the farmers will get more, for their potatoes as the result of a scheme now being formulated by the Departments of Agriculture and of Economics and Markets. The scheme will give effect to a resolution by the potato producers' meeting recently held at Bethal which sent a deputation to the Minister of Agriculture to ask him to establish a control board for the potato industry. The deputation has just returned with the information that the Government has accepted the principle of statutory control of the industry and that the export of potatoes to Britain will be arranged on a levy basis. Although Britain can secure unlimited quantities of potatoes from America at a far lower price, it is understood that the British Ministry of Food is prepared to give South Africa preference and buy potatoes here for approximately £12 a long ton at Union ports. This will give the producer about 6s. 8d. a bag on rail. The Government assesses the farmer's cost of production at 8s. a bag and the price paid for exported potatoes will be made up to 10s. a bag by a levy. In addition, prices on the local market will be regulated to give the farmer a fair return. The price to the consumer will also be lower than hitherto.

Our own correspondent writes:

'Potatoes have been fetching very high prices here right since the beginning of the war. Before the war the usual price for best potatoes was about 8s. 6d. to 10s. a bag. About a month ago they were still selling at about 35s. a bag for best and then there was an extra big crop, about a month ago, and the market was flooded. Now prices have improved again but the growers, who would not hear of a controlled price when prices were high, have been crying for control to save themselves from ruin. Potato land in the Bethal District which sold for about £10 a morgen (1 morgen=about 2½ acres) before the war has since been bought, owing to the high prices for potatoes, at £40 to £50 a morgen. Now, it seems to me, that the British consumer will have to pay more for potatoes just to bolster up the price of land here. And that with a Labour Government there!'

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