

## A WEEK-END AT LEEDS.

As our report of the Leeds Conference very well indicates, it was a timely and well-directed demonstration of the strength of our ideas in Yorkshire. There was not a hitch in the arrangements from beginning to end, and for this we were indebted to the Chairman and Secretary of the League. The Chairman's opening speech and the resolution acclaiming the Russian revolution revealed the radical spirit of the meeting and left no doubt whatever as to the character of both platform and audience. The various points dealt with, backed up by illustrations from both town and country, drove home the contention that the monopoly of land was at the root of social problems. Following on the Conferences held at London, Manchester, and Glasgow during the past twelve months, this Leeds event proved that the public sentiment for the Taxation of Land Values can still be relied upon to account for itself in the political, municipal, and industrial life of the country.

At the close of the more formal meeting at the Philosophical Hall over fifty delegates came together by arrangement for a modest meal in the large dining room of the Hotel Metropole, the Headquarters of the League, and the home of its guests for the week-end. It was quite a reunion and would have meant much for the cause but for the black shadow of the war which appeared at times as the all-pervading influence. There were lively conversations all round the room echoing the sharper notes sounded at the Conference and coping with new ideas and suggestions which had not come up in the debate. In one corner animated laughter kept pace with awkward-looking statements as to how the tax could be passed on. The dogmatic replies to this stumbling-block seemed to paralyse the group, who gladly sought refuge and peace of mind in some gift of literature on the subject, to be devoured before the sun rose on another day. There were other items of more than passing interest to chronicle at this enjoyable banquet, but space forbids. The prevailing harmony and the enthusiasm of this social gathering will be long remembered by all who were privileged to be present.

The meal ended, we adjourned to a spacious comfortable hall, where we settled down to some three hours' solid talk of the real give-and-take kind. Amid a hum of voices evidently closing in on unproved statements under examination at the tea-table Mr. Smithson was moved to the chair.

In the name of the League he gave a Yorkshire

welcome to members of the Conference, and especially to the speakers and visitors who had come from a distance to help make their effort that day a successful one. The day's work had enabled them to feel the pulse of the movement for the restoration of the land to the people as well as for their practical steps to this end, and it was most reassuring. In the days to come, in the days of the immediate future, there would be some stirring movement for social regeneration; but they knew that unless the many schemes proposed, some already under way, for resettlement and reconstruction after the war

had their roots in land free from the bondage of monopoly they would be foundationed on the sand and go down before the incoming waves of popular unrest and suspicion. The flood of ideas released by the events of this great upheaval would pay little heed to adjustments that left the problem of poverty unsettled. In these circumstances it was no more than our duty to be meeting in Conference as free men with a well-defined purpose. Let us be patient with each other's ideas, let us get together as often as possible for conversations, such as we were having, assured that out of this plain human way of working the truth we were out for would come to its own. The chief note struck at the Conference was one of no hostility, but rather of forbearance and goodwill. He invited everyone present to maintain that spirit. Let us speak out and get to know each other as the only safe and enduring means to a better understanding and for the cause we are met to promote.

Let us this evening, off the

chain, so to speak, get down to the points of agreement, see where we differ, and how we can, if need be, agree to differ, as men and women out for social justice and fair play to all.

The speakers who followed maintained the high level set by the chairman and we can only regret that our reporter, engaged specially for the Conference, was not present to do justice to one of the most informing and engaging meetings of the kind it has been my experience and my privilege to attend. Many friendships were renewed and new ones formed which will tell later for excellent propaganda.

A feature of the proceedings was a cordial vote of thanks to Mr. Skirrow who had done so much to make the day stand out as one to be remembered in the annals of the movement. This was carried by acclamation. Mr. Skirrow, though one of our most capable platform



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exponents, always finds it difficult to speak at any meeting of the "Academy." He replied in his usual way by asking all Yorkshire men in the room to help him to get access as a speaker to any kind of meeting in their territory, and to assist in the circulation of the literature.

The guests staying at the Hotel over the week-end continued the talk into the small hours of the morning.

Sunday morning was a go-as-you-please event. The weather was of the best for outdoor exercise, and several rambles and tram rides to the outskirts passed the time.

In the afternoon a hurriedly arranged platform was provided, Mr. Smithson presiding, for Mr. Humphreys, Secretary of the Proportional Representation Society, who gave an informing explanation of his subject, replying at the close to questions.

The evening and the closing meeting of the series was held in the large room of the Hotel. Mr. Smithson again presided and Mr. J. Dundas White, M.P., opened a discussion on "Economic Freedom the only Basis of Permanent Peace." A fruitful discussion followed an able exposition of the subject, and for the second time I found myself wishing our reporter was at hand.

These two meetings following the Official Conference, together with the never-ending informing week-end conversations, left everyone gratified, encouraged and inspired as never before during these past three trying years. This feeling is very well expressed in a letter by a lady delegate, from which I quote:—

"I think times like this Conference just passed permit us to breathe for a moment a purer air in which our spirits, our souls, our higher selves, come to their own. We are for the moment what we ought to be, what men and women will be every day when our great gospel is believed and acted upon. I had never realised before that men and women might indeed love men and women and children, all of them, as if they were really their own flesh and blood. It has been a revelation to me. I don't know why I wanted to tell you about it, but I did want to tell you."

There were many suggestions made and noted for further consideration. I must name two.

One, that we ought to have a series of conferences, with-out resolutions, in various centres, between ourselves and representatives from Labour organisations. This kind of meeting has often been held in the past, sometimes quite informally, and at other times by design, in the form of question and answer. At the Glasgow Conference last November, Mr. Outhwaite brought it up again as a special duty incumbent upon us at this time. The presence of the Labour men at Leeds and their genuine difficulties and misunderstandings lent weight and colour to the idea. In past years Single Taxers have in the main associated themselves in politics with the Liberal Party; the bottom and abiding reason being that Liberalism has, or had, no definite, specific, economic creed. Mr. Lloyd George has given them one and it has been accepted without much, if any, protest from organised Liberalism. Before the war we were told in the Liberal press that Liberalism meant A Nation Insured. After the war it looks as if Liberalism will mean A Nation Card Indexed, and by a bureaucracy instituted on the best approved Fabian Society principle.

The Labour Party has an economic creed and it is one that is fundamentally opposed to the economics of the Single Tax. This is quite a story by itself, yet it is one which cannot wisely or safely be ignored.

Let times change and we with time.

So far as it goes Liberalism has now some economics, opposed in principle to ours, and to its own declared belief in the taxation of land values as a means to economic emancipation and freedom to produce as well as to exchange goods. The Liberal Party has taken its new economics from Mr. Lloyd George and he got them in Germany. But men, it has been well said, are better than their creeds, and here lies the hope of the radical land reformer. Just as Liberalism has taken to itself the economics and the philosophy of the German-made Insurance Act as a cure for poverty, wages boards and rent courts, with all the official direction and control of the lives and industry of the people which these policies involve, there are signs that the Labour Party is beginning to question its thirty years' agitation for this kind of reform. But they are still unconvinced as to the liberating tendencies of a tax on land values. They are kicking hard, at least some of the more radical among them are, at the bureaucracy now in vogue; but they still believe in the principle. They are out for industrial emancipation by way of State ownership and control. Single Taxers are out for the same ideal, but by way of economic freedom and with as little State control as possible.

But this is a subject which may be considered at length some other day. Meanwhile Single Taxers need have no regrets as to their past conduct. They were out for a tax on land values, and in the circumstances they chose the line of least resistance. The success of their well-directed propaganda is realised and acknowledged in the wide-spread sentiment for the reform they advocated. The line they will take to-day is the one they have always chosen, *i.e.*, keep the flag flying before the people and make the most of the politicians. The salvation or the safety of the Single Taxers is that they are out for a principle, quite indifferent as to the name of the party that gives effect to it.

The second suggestion was that Single Taxers should meet at least once a year for conversations. The idea is to have a week or a long week-end together, to get to know each other better, for an interchange of views, and to hammer into shape new plans and schemes for any kind of action that may seem at the time to be feasible. This proposed annual outing for Single Taxers is certain to receive full and favourable consideration from all concerned. New recruits are constantly coming into the circle, keen to take part in the thoughts and anxieties of the day. Such friends grow in numbers with the advance of the movement. Their fellowship and the help they can render can only add to our strength and influence. They must be recognised and heard, and what better plan could there be for this than a series of meetings got up on the part-holiday and part-business principle?

J. P.

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