



## LAND & LIBERTY

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### A YEAR OF GOODWILL

The dangerous classes politically are the very rich and the very poor. It is not the taxes that he is conscious of paying that gives a man a stake in the country, an interest in its government; it is the consciousness of feeling that he is an integral part of the community: that its prosperity is his prosperity, and its disgrace his shame. Let but the citizen feel this; let him be surrounded by all the influences that spring from and cluster round a comfortable home, and the community may rely upon him, even to limb or to life. Men do not vote patriotically, any more than they fight patriotically, because of their payment of taxes. Whatever conduces to the comfortable and independent material condition of the masses will best foster public spirit, will make the ultimate governing power more intelligent and more virtuous.—*Progress and Poverty*, Book VIII., Chapter IV.

The opening days of the New Year are overflowing with a promise of better times that is almost impressive. Arresting headlines in the Press on the subject positively glow with the thought that at long last the active and the derivative factors in production, or their representatives, are to meet on common ground, there to establish new rules and regulations on the give-and-take principle for their own good and for the benefit of the community as a whole.

The Prime Minister in his message to his sworn supporters writes: "There is a better spirit in industry and a greater desire on the part of capital and labour to co-operate with each other in the solution of the problems of industry"; but just in case anything unforeseen should occur likely to interfere with this benediction, he warns his friends in so many words "to prepare for the next general election." This word in season is in its own place and we make no apology in passing it on to our own public. To paraphrase Mr Baldwin's exhortation: The land value policy will be subject to much

misrepresentation by its well-organized and well-equipped opponents and our people are expected to correct the misstatement and fallacies, and above all to break in on the silences that will be observed in every contested election. We sincerely wish our vigilant corps of workers in all three parties, and those outside their membership, a year of active and successful propaganda.

In the more appealing and perhaps more restricted sphere of effort the captains of industry and the trade union leaders are very much in earnest. May they hold together and successfully traverse every avenue to a better understanding; but if the idea is that good intention waits on goodwill and prosperity on both, the net result will not count for much measured in terms of work and wages. Economic law does not resent co-operation of labour and capital, but unless the resolution is in harmony with economic freedom and fairplay no substantial gain is possible. That has been the experience of all who ever sought to raise new ethical standards on the quicksands of expediency, unrelated to natural law in social life.

Considered in the light of economic truth and tried by the canons of elementary logic the postulates of our accepted authorities are framed on mere guesswork; their facts are doctored and established to suit their narrow vision. Not even the experience of past failures can teach the spokesmen of capital and labour the lesson that the land question lies at the root of the trouble they seek to remove. On occasion they can glance at the land monopoly and proclaim how the taxpayer is being bled white in the high price of land, but none seem capable or free to connect these phenomena with industrial distress.

Why is it that, in spite of invention, and the stimulating increase of wealth that comes of it, the wages of common labour remain at bare subsistence level? The answer is that the surplus of the new production is appropriated in the rent of land: as rent rises wages fall. But this analysis is not within the purview of our governors. The State is requisitioned to make good the loss to labour, and the more the State provides, the more insistent becomes the cry for further supplies. As someone has facetiously remarked: "The time approaches when the child will be taken over by the State when it is born and handed back to its parents when it is ready for the dole." Yet as the burden is piled on industry and the taxpayer bemoans his hard lot, the annual financial statement of the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the year is certain to give proof once again that the existing system of raising public revenue means an unconditional present of hundreds of millions of pounds to some people.

The debate on Unemployment in the House of Commons, 19th December, does not make pleasant reading for those who by goodwill would lift industry into the desired haven of peace and contentment. The resolution moved by Mr Johnston (Dundee) declared that the extensive and long-continued unemployment of approximately one million men and women is a matter of national concern, calling for the adoption of a comprehensive

national policy that would stimulate industry, relieve it in the necessitous areas, provide work, or training, and adequate maintenance of the unemployed. Except for a reflection on the inadequacy of the present economic system the resolution is barren of any policy that would stimulate production. What direction it does give, if adopted, could only add to the taxpayer's burden and restrict his purchasing power. In the course of his speech Mr Johnston quoted figures to the effect that "rates (local taxation) are rising in distressed areas, the special areas in which our heavy industries are," and urged "that if these are to be subject to an ever-increasing burden, it will be impossible for them to recover."

Another speaker said that "in Lancashire there are 200 mills in the hands of the banks, and that money has been lent by the banks to the cotton-spinning trade to the amount of some £15,000,000; short-time, regulated prices and restricted output had all been tried and failed."

The debate showed no advance on former pronouncements on the unemployed problem and can be summed up as a demand for subsidies that, however wisely expended, could only in the long run restrict the field of employment. The example of the beet sugar subsidy is a case in point. While it stimulated production in one industry, it turned thousands of workers out of another. The teaching of economics here is that one pound's worth of wealth can only command one pound's worth of service; whatever be the intention of any disturbance the mean level of employment can neither be raised nor lowered by transferring purchasing power from one section of the community to another.

In reply to Col. Wedgwood, the Minister of Labour consigned the unemployed to the Dominions. On Mr MacLaren asking why people should go so far from home for land Sir A. Steel-Maitland replied that "there is a Law of Diminishing Returns." But if, as has been proved, the Law applies not only to Agriculture but to all industry, it has passed for ever out of the argument. It is a peculiar law that reveals the farmer in the back blocks of Canada longing for a Manchester or a Birmingham to spring up within walking distance of his farm, and the home farmer so placed piteously calling on the State to pay his rates. The Law of Diminishing Returns in Agriculture is not a law but a superstition, and the inference that all land in Great Britain is used to its fullest capacity can be taken for what it is worth. The best comment on this plausible talk in the House of Commons is that on the previous day, Parliament, on the motion of the Minister of Agriculture, increased to £5,400,000, the year's subsidy to the production of sugar from home-grown beet!

More than one speaker in the debate referred to the devastating burden of the rates, but no one thought of Sydney, Wellington (New Zealand) or Johannesburg, three capital cities within the Empire where not a rate falls on industry, but wholly on the monopoly value of the land. Why are these rate-free centres not mentioned when the sad plight of our "necessitous areas" comes under Parliamentary discussion? The truth is that if local rates were

transferred from industry to land value, the economic incidence of the change, in a free trade country like Great Britain, would at once stimulate production and reduce the volume of unemployment; and this without the addition of one shilling to the national debt.

Every industrial and political advance that comes from patient research and strife carries with it the seed of further inequalities in wealth and social service. It can be safely affirmed that unless the goodwill of 1928 takes the law of rent into partnership nothing can come of its Conferences calculated to alter the situation to any good purpose. While the existing system obtains, the unemployed millions, the debt and the tariff walls of Europe, are masters of the situation. Each and all of these drawbacks to mutual help and understanding have their roots in the monopoly of God's bounties. Land monopoly is the jaw of the vice that everywhere crushes the workers against material progress. The goodwill that declines to take cognizance of the primary injustice that, working through society, wafts some few into opulence and influence, without regard to any personal merit or service of their own, and condemns the many to hardship and impotence has nothing to say for itself, whatever be the desire or the object of its philanthropic advocates.

The assumption that what the worker wants is work, not wealth, that the opportunities to employment are limited by the amount of capital society has at its command at any given time, still hangs like a nightmare over the aspirations of men in all lands who honestly and sedulously seek to make an end of strife in industry. Yet, in view of nature's abundance and in the light that science sheds so generously on human skill and ingenuity, the fear of any limit to the production of wealth, either for immediate needs, or for the capital necessary to further expansion, is the kind of illusion that must have prompted Carlyle in his day to name the science of political economy the "dismal science." But such an illusion is difficult to dispel, especially when its ejection from the discussion implies the liberation of the masses from the legalized interests that batten on the legitimate earnings of industry. Nobody really believes that nature is niggardly. It is a revolting thought and the opposing belief that "we sail through space on a well-provisioned ship" is what gives tone, character and colour to democratic ideals.

Fifty years ago Henry George observed in his *Social Problems*: "Although we have but begun to systematize our knowledge of physical nature, it is evident she will refuse us no desire if we but seek its gratification in accordance with her laws." The intervening years have fully justified the view. The resources of nature as they are revealed from the margin to the centre of population, in every quarter of the globe, and the wonders of science in the process of reaching out to new supplies should stand for the material intellectual and moral enrichment of all mankind; and this assuredly would be our inheritance but for the economic injustice this journal and its related agencies exist to expose.

Emigration, social insurance, subsidies, safe-

guarding and the dole for the unwanted able-bodied members of the community are the political catchwords of the political parties, each government in turn going one better than the other on the road to ruin. But as one genius writes in a leading article in a Conservative daily newspaper, in defence of the Unemployment Insurance Act of last session: "The acceptance of this expenditure merely strengthens the demand for national economy." Prodigious! The more the Government spends the greater the inducement to save. Perhaps the writer was merely poking fun at the gospel of thrift, in the absence of some colleague appointed to maintain the enthusiasm for the National Savings Certificates.

But what, after all, is the difference between this by-play and the ramshackle economics that, session after session, occupy the pages of Hansard? There is no lack of goodwill either in Industry or in Parliament. The mischief lies in the failure to realize that natural openings to employment are held to ransom and that the law of wages is contained within the four corners of the law of rent. It is for those who see this truth to rise to the height of the great argument and give their voice, their strength and their influence to its service.

J. P.

### THE FARMER AND HIS SHORT MEMORY

The National Union of Farmers, through its local branches and its agencies in the "Councils of Agriculture," is making all the agitation it can for the total relief of agricultural land from local taxation. On the 19th December, at Ormskirk, Mr. Neville Chamberlain told the farmers that their memories were not very good. They have had the Agricultural Rates Act of 1896, and the further Measure of 1923, reducing local rates on agricultural land to one-quarter. In the last four years the relief had amounted to £14,000,000. The policy was debated in the House of Commons on 13th December, when the Expiring Laws Continuation Bill was considered.

To speak of short memories is unkind. The appetite for subsidies grows by what it feeds on, and the patient still has that gnawing feeling of starvation, easily forgetting the meal he is supposed to have digested. The farmer, in this regard is like Munchausen's truncated horse that kept drinking at the well. Let the flow of subsidies be never so great until it provides not only all the rates and taxes and attempts to pay all the rents as well, the farmer, like the poor fagged horse cut in two in the battle, cannot retain them. His condition gets worse and worse. If his observation were better than his memory, he would see that the favours he craved at the expense of the State only went to endow land monopoly and bring disaster and ruin on his own head.

A. W. M.

#### NATURAL LAW IN SOCIAL LIFE

By W. R. Lester, M.A.

Being the Author's Address at the International Conference in Copenhagen, July, 1926. Second imprint of a Pamphlet much in demand.

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### THE SUSTENTION FUND Prospects for 1923

In wishing our readers a Happy New Year, and for the Movement greater strength and influence, we desire to say that the Sustention Fund has come well to the aid of *Land & Liberty* during the past year. A cordial vote of thanks is hereby rendered to each subscriber.

A special call addressed at the close of the year to over one hundred friends, mostly known for their firm attachment to the cause, brought a response by no means disappointing. There were some regrets and a goodly number of promises which will be made good later on.

Among the stimulating replies to this appeal one came from an old subscriber whom we know only by correspondence. It was in the following terms:—

"I shall be pleased to contribute £25 if and when other 99 promises will give a no less sum. Awaiting your reply."

One hundred £25 subscriptions for the current year would put the Journal and its related services in a sound financial position, and incidentally set the office free for much needed and effective propaganda.

The next General Election now looms in sight, and the political parties through their press and on their platforms are appealing to their supporters for the necessary money to enable them to prepare for the coming contest.

Political life and movement is our opportunity to make opinion for the land value policy and to reach out to new friendships for its wider acceptance.

With adequate funds at our disposal *Land & Liberty* could be posted regularly to scores and hundreds of representative speakers and workers in all centres who know how to make use of the information it carries each month.

New leaflets for distribution at meetings should not be wanting; most of Henry George's enlightening addresses, in pamphlet form, are out of print, and they are in constant demand.

In these and in other calls for equipment our friend's appeal is more than justified; and he is not without support. Already seven subscribers like-minded with himself have gladly put down their names for this sum. Seven is a good beginning. We now engage in the quest for the remaining ninety-two.

To enlist in this well-timed plan does not mean an immediate payment of £25. Some few already contribute month by month to the Sustention Fund. One who gives constant support in this way writes (27th December): "What is wanted is a systematic campaign for regular pledges of support, to be paid monthly, quarterly or otherwise, so that the office can depend upon a definite income and budget accordingly."

That is certainly the ideal method of controlling revenue and expenditure. It is difficult to attain, but we are not without hope of seeing the principle put fully into practice.

J. P.