

LAND VALUES

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"OUR POLICY"

"We would simply take for the community what belongs to the community—the value that attaches to land by the growth of the community; leave sacredly to the individual all that belongs to the individual.—

Henry George.

THE COMING OF THE LABOUR PARTY

In the Budget Statement for the year explained by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Commons, April 30th, the land taxes are blotted out of the picture and in their stead we have the first instalment of the kind of Protection, advocated so long ago, that was wont to make the Liberal Free Traders have sleepless nights in the feverish desire to save the country from such wickedness.

We live in days that are far removed from the raging tearing campaign, and the Budget of 1919 brings us to Colonial Preference sharp on the heels of the Indian Cotton duties and the export duty on pine kernels grown within the Empire. Where are the Liberals now who voted for these measures which carried with them a shameless abandonment of the Free Trade principle?

The Liberal press, faithful to its party, with or without principle, are already busy developing a recrudescence of the ancient Free Trade *versus* Tariff Reform stunt, but the Paris Conference resolutions, drafted and approved by its own leaders, is the ghost at this feast.

Meanwhile, Mr. Robert Smillie, the miners' leader, steps on to the stage with a bold enough pronouncement on the fuller and broader issue. The hour appears to have brought the man, and who shall say that the former radical supporters of the Liberal party, who stand for plain speaking and plain dealing, are not behind Mr. Smillie and against the Liberal reactionaries who so basely betrayed the cause that brought them to place and power?

Mr. Smillie is for Free Trade without compromise. With him it is a principle to be maintained at all costs, and not so much party possessions to be bartered away in exchange for the help of the Tariff Reformer at some critical hour in the fortunes of the country.

Mr. Asquith tells us that he still believes that this is a country that can best get on with the largest possible measure of Free Trade. Mr. Smillie says, I am a Free Trader, I am for Free Trade for this country and for every other country as well. The one statement bears the stamp of unbelief and vacillation, the other is one that rings true; the one is of a narrow, selfish, elusive character; the other makes for a lasting international brotherhood and peace. The miners' leader is determined that the cause of the workers everywhere shall be heard. Since the passing of that great democrat, Campbell-Bannerman, there has been no voice in our politics like that of Robert Smillie.

For eight long years the Liberals at the very height of their fame and influence for sound and enduring economic changes played with the land and housing questions. The Liberal leaders came to power for selfish ends, or their platform promises and pledges were but the measure of the scant knowledge they possessed of the underlying causes of popular unrest. In either case they were ill-prepared to grapple with the organised forces and agencies opposed to any sweeping changes in the land laws, and the case for reconstruction went by default. They said they would open up the land for small men, remove the injustice and hardships of bad housing conditions, and make the land the treasure house of the nation and not the pleasure ground of the rich. Their record since shows that they never intended doing anything of the kind. In 1903 Mr. Lloyd George declared that Housing of the Working-Classes Bills "would never be effective until you tackle the Taxation of Land Values." In 1906 Mr. Asquith promised the Municipalities the Rating of Land Values in unqualified terms. Instead of these searching reforms there was nothing but botchwork all through. The Small Holdings Acts did not take the people to the land. The Corn Production Act was designed to raise the rent of land, and when this was accomplished we have the Land Acquisition Bill and the anti-Limehouse call of Mr. Lloyd George that full market value must be paid the monopolisers. These are the "land reforms" that mark the place where the Liberal party stumbled and fell.

The miners' leader is out for more drastic measures than a paltry penny in the pound on the capital value of land. He will have a solution, he insists, of these problems one way or another, and he has behind him the driving power of the organised labour movement. But he has something far more sustaining than this well-directed support. He has by his side the inspiring moral enthusiasm of countless men and women in all circles of society who can know no rest until at least the people are housed in decency and comfort. This fine sentiment was cast adrift by the Liberals, and now it is with the gathering forces of a democracy that knows not the case for Liberalism and cares as little for its empty abstract principles.

The Liberals would not proceed by way of Taxing Land Values as they promised to do. They would not go into the wilderness for this safe and sound solution of social

problems, and now they are in it for their ineptitude and backsliding. The Parliament of 1906-10 had neither the inclination nor the nerve to attack the root cause of undeserved poverty, and the people have come to realise that they must look more and more to themselves if they would share in the benefits of social progress. That is the true meaning of the rising power and influence of the labour force that seems to work and thrive outside the recognised conventions and rules of parliamentary government. How soon the Labour party will establish itself as the governing body depends upon the labour men themselves. The advent of Mr. Smillie has taken them a considerable distance on the way.

The Budget provides for the scrapping of the fancy land duties, which have done nothing but bring discredit on the more radical proposals for land value taxation. These duties should have been scrapped long ago. They were accepted as the scaffolding for land valuation, out of which was to come the genuine reform, in the words of their sponsor, that "would enable the people and the children of the people to enter into their inheritance from on high."

The War hung up the precious cargo of Valuation data, and the Corn Production Act has knocked the props completely from under the jerry-built erection.

The enemies, Tory and Liberal, of the radical taxation of the communal value of land, so defined by Mr. Asquith and his Cabinet, scarcely got a breath to rejoice over the downfall of the harmless though irritating land duties, when the Miners' leader calls the Royalty owners to the Coal Commission. They are to come with their title deeds, and to defend their claims to the plunder of that vicious corner in landlordism. Verily, these high-placed exploiters of public values and their well-paid agents who have spent their money so lavishly in defending the citadel of privilege will one day, and perhaps sooner than they expect, wish they had yielded to the moderate demand for a beginning with a just system of land tenure and taxation. The Taxation of Land Values may seem in the days to come quite a conservative-looking policy.

There is no cure for unemployment, we are told by the "Authorities" and puzzled publicists. What they mean is no cure under existing economic adjustments, and they are right. The cure is to be found in the deeper cut, in the restoration of the rights of the people to the natural storehouse, the land. The people realise how they are being defrauded, and Mr. Smillie is on safe ground when he says he is out, not for a few paltry acres for housing here and there, but for the whole of the land of the country.

Speaking to a recent deputation representing the National Federation of General Workers, the Minister of Labour (Sir Robert Horne) said he regarded the present situation, in respect of employment and hardship, as far more difficult than any situation with which we were confronted during the War. The reason why, he continued, national factories were not being used to provide work was not because it would interfere with private enterprise; everybody would be at work, he declared, if there were plenty of employment, and the reason why there was not plenty of employment was because the private manufacturers could not find sufficient work. If the Government, he explained, started to make things in national factories

which were made by private manufacturers they would be making things for which there was no market with the private manufacturers, and so forcing them to close down.

What a confession of helplessness! It looks more like a speech of some new beginner at a P.S.A. meeting rather than the words of the Labour Minister of a British Government voted into office five months ago to make this a land worth living in. Over a million pounds a week are disbursed in unemployment benefit by the State. The beneficiaries or their representatives demand the opportunity of earning an honest living, and they are calmly, if not brutally, told that nothing can be done because the manufacturers cannot find sufficient work!

What is work? It means the fashioning by labour of the raw material of land into forms necessary to satisfy human want and to gratify human desire. Food can only be grown on land; houses can only be erected on land, the material used in building comes from land. Even in a city the work of exchanging goods means land for warehouses, shops, stores and all kinds of traffic. Now what is the trouble? In plain language, the land, the source of all life and all production, is privately owned and controlled. It is deliberately held out of use at ransom prices. There is a land blockade, with the result that the people who want food, shelter and clothing, and are only too ready to work for these satisfactions stand idle in the market place. No one wants them or their labour, and when they seek to employ themselves they are told that they must buy the opportunity. When they answer they have nothing to buy with, they are told to wait until the land and housing schemes of the Government get beyond the paper stage.

The land is fenced in and the unemployed are fenced out. The land is parcelled out to the few, and the many can do what they like about it. That is the plain English of the dilemma, and the plain answer to it is that there will be work for all when the people determine that the land shall be liberated, laws, customs and conventions notwithstanding.

J. P.

TWO NEW PAMPHLETS

JUSTICE THE OBJECT TAXATION THE MEANS

(An Address by Henry George)

HOW MODERN CIVILISATION MAY DECLINE

(Reprint of Chapter 4 Book X
of PROGRESS AND POVERTY)

ONE PENNY EACH

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