

LAND VALUES

Twenty-third Year. (Established June, 1894)

Monthly 1d. By Post 2s. per annum.
(United States and Canada, 50 cents.)

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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 GLASGOW CONFERENCE

"As a town planner of many years' standing I am much disappointed that so little, I might say nothing, worth having has resulted for the poorer classes from the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1909. In my opinion nothing worth having for the poorer classes will result from this Act until it has behind it the rating and taxation of land values."—*JOHN S. NETTLEFOLD.*

"Those who hold the land of the country ought to be called upon to pay for its defence. . . . It is high time that the land values of the country should catch the eye of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. . . . What is meant by land values? Take this place wherein we are gathered. Suppose that you remove the roof; that you took away the floors, that you demolished the walls, and that you took up and carted away everything that human industry had placed on or in or under the soil. What would you have then? You would have a certain number of square yards in an important part of the City of Glasgow and the ownership of these square yards would carry with it the right of what lay below down to the centre of the earth, and also the unrestricted air space above; and in this community where competition is keen you would find that that land would possess a very high value and that a high value would be given for it. That is the value which we are out to tax."—*JAMES DUNDAS WHITE, M.P.*

"You in Glasgow have indeed a splendid record upon this question. Thirty years ago you made up your mind that land monopoly was a foe to your city and to your country. You organised yourselves for the purpose of combating it. You instructed your representatives on your municipal corporation, who for over twenty years have always been to the fore in every movement for the taxation of land values. I am glad that to-day you are here again to show that you are not satisfied merely because this country is at war that the fruits of all your work should go for nought, that to-day, as insistently as ever, you demand that land values should be taxed."—*P. WILSON RAFFAN, M.P.*

"You will have to increase the production of wealth and the only way to increase the production of wealth

is to open to the hands of labour the source from which alone wealth can be produced, and that is the soil of the country. And we hold that this system of the taxation of land values will not only turn the landlords' tribute into the Treasury but will end the dog-in-the-manger system whereby a man holds up land which he will not use himself and will not allow others to use. . . . I believe this war to be the end of the sham democracies of the world."—*R. L. OUTHWAITE, M.P.*

The conference convened under the auspices of the Scottish League at Glasgow on November 4th will rank as one of the most successful and inspiring events of the kind yet held. There is at all times a warm and enthusiastic welcome in Glasgow for any new rendering of the struggle for human betterment, but whatever the question of the moment may be there is ever a volume of sentiment and an unflinching measure of support for radical land reform.

When the holding of this conference was first mooted we were asked in the interest of the movement if it were wise to take the risk of failure. There would be a poor response, we were told, and such an experience would be taken to mean that the torch we held had flickered out. Was it not better to assume the old-time strength, even if we had it not? A sparsely-attended meeting for Land Values Taxation in Glasgow appeared in the minds of our doleful counsellors to be the outcome of the venture. As in former times these words of caution came from men who always, to their credit be it said, wish the movement well, the while they busy themselves with other causes. They had the answer to their misgivings in one of the most enthusiastic and promising meetings ever held on the subject.

In some respects, especially in regard to the number of delegates in attendance from Trades Unions and Labour circles, the conference surpassed any other similar conference held in pre-war days. This was one of its most encouraging features. For reasons which are obvious these men seldom or never hear the case for land values taxation as a means of raising wages and bettering their condition all round. When the question has not been deliberately kept in the background at their own meetings they have been advised by speakers who for one reason or another stand for conservative and abortive measures in the matter of land reform not to look to the movement associated with the name of Henry George. They were told that this was either a reactionary or an impossible theory, or both; that it stood for confiscation and could not bring any good to the worker. But the standard has been maintained and the light has entered into many dark corners since the message of PROGRESS AND POVERTY was first proclaimed.

Henry George, as he made plain in his epoch-making book, set out to inquire why it was that in the midst of

advancing wealth poverty accompanied progress. In the examination he found the land question. He traced poverty to the door of landlordism, and in the cause of the trouble he found the remedy he fearlessly advocated. Time has justified the "Prophet of San Francisco," and to-day there is a mass of evidence, culled from the facts of daily experience and put on record by honest and painstaking investigators, that the land question is at the bottom of social evils. Almost every honest attempt to advance along the lines of municipal progress, or to bring some measure of relief to a poverty-stricken population, has but ended in showing the need for land reform. It is this experience that has maintained and developed the sentiment and support for the taxation of land values far more than anything the disciples of Henry George have done, or could do. For the light shed on social problems by this great teacher, no less than for his wise direction, the great world-wide, pulsing movement for reform owes him indeed a great debt of gratitude. This is acknowledged in the ever-advancing movement which he founded and carried into the field of practical politics.

This great advance is ignored and kept out of sight by the Press, and by many who stand in the good name of labour for social justice. We can understand the Press, knowing well the influences that keep it in bondage to present-day monopoly conditions. But it is difficult to follow or to fathom the opposition of those who are presumably concerned with the well-being of the hard-pressed, over-worked and under-paid labouring man. It is true that in the struggle for land reform these Labour leaders have not been altogether inactive, but it is passing strange how in their proposed remedies they met at a conjunction with conservative forces, there to swell the current making for impossible schemes of land purchase and for Government control and regulation. Their land policies made always for raising the price of land, and the driving power they had at their command, which was so urgently needed for the essential preliminary step, was misdirected into channels out of which nothing could come, as nothing has come, but disaster and disappointment. Experience is known to be a hard taskmaster. It has been at work in the labour ranks, as in other places, these past twenty years, and at last there are signs that baffled and beaten with these false remedies and their utter futility, the Labour movement is assuming a saner attitude to the growing need for a reform which will work, and with the minimum of assistance from well-placed State officials.

There are two contending views in Labour circles, and in society at large, as to the position of labour. One is that labour needs the protection and the aid of the State; the other is that labour makes the State and keeps it going, such as it is. The trouble begins when those who hold to the second and truer view of the case commence to translate their faith into the politics of the day.

The taxation of land values is a reform which, by opening up the opportunities to labour that are to be found in the idle acres, will widen the field of employment and raise wages. To this there are only two objections that need be considered—one is named confiscation, the other that the tax can be passed on. Sometimes both views are held and vehemently expressed by the

same person. At the conference the first of these objections was raised inferentially, the second explicitly, and was completely answered by one of the speakers. As to the first objection, the answer to it is that if the value of land is created and maintained by the presence and activities of the people as a whole and not by the landowners, and if the people are not in possession of this value, then confiscation is already established. From this viewpoint, to tax land values looks more like a method of restitution. But all this has been said before in these columns, yet must, we fear, be often said again.

But let us look at what has been done in recent times to deal with the land question by other methods than ours. There was a land hunger before the war for purposes of agriculture, housing and industry. After the war settlement and reconstruction schemes now in progress, combined with dearth of housing accommodation from end to end of the country, but make the demand more imperative.

Mr. Nettlefold in his timely and informing letter to the conference expressed his disappointment that so little had been done under the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909; the men who are out for a patch of ground to cultivate make a similar complaint as to the failure of the Small Holdings Acts of England and Scotland. The breakdown of these measures, hailed at the time of their passing as the means to the end of housing difficulties and to the regeneration of the country-side, constitutes in itself the lesson we have so diligently endeavoured to teach and explain. As these Acts passed from the realm of controversy into legislative enactment we predicted their failure. They were worse than failures, for they raised hopes that could not be fulfilled and reduced a magnificent enthusiasm almost to dust and ashes. They looked well enough in parts, on paper, but they never got much beyond the paper stage.

If this indictment of these great liberation Acts (so named), designed to open up the land to the people, is not true, and if they are not the hopeless failures they are commonly believed to be, then what is all the trouble about? The demand for land is keen, and grows keener as the war proceeds, ever forcing upon us the need for new adjustments in our social and industrial life. If these Acts will work let them work now. If they cannot effect what is required, if they cannot loosen the desired acres from the galling chains of monopoly let this be frankly admitted, and let us turn in freedom to some better plan.

The resolutions carried at the conference with so much earnestness point the way to the only remedy worth the name. All that is lacking is the will to face up to the dog-in-the-manger. The taxation of land values is no new cry. Its merits as a provider of land have been time and again approved by the electors, and there are members of the Government whose public pledges on the question have still to be redeemed. For ourselves the conference, like the similar one held in London in May last, enabled us to feel the pulse of the movement. It indicates that the cause we advocate has not only not gone back during the past two years but that new ground has been gained and that our people keep steadily before them the call for renewed and greater effort.

J. P.