

## 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 GOVERNMENT AND THE LAND QUESTION

### "A BELEAGUERED CITY"

"I suppose we are all agreed on some things, one being that it is necessary, at any rate, that as a preliminary step there should be a separate assessment on site values. . . . We (the Government) desire to have time to consider carefully the best way of giving effect to the principles I have enunciated and which I think we all hold in common. . . . I believe we shall arrive at a more satisfactory and more permanent result if we allow ourselves a little more patience for the consideration of this problem, than if we were to introduce a comparatively small and piecemeal instalment of the reform we all desire."—*Mr. Asquith, replying in the House of Commons to a deputation of 518 Local Authorities presenting a petition in favour of the Rating of Land Values, February 26th, 1906.*

"Take the land question. Every Liberal tells you that that is the root of everything, but up to the present we have just dealt with it as if we were handling a hedgehog. . . . In the South Wales valleys you have got hundreds of thousands a year paid in rent and ground rents and dead rents and wayleaves, and licences and fees—paid by men who risk their lives every day to earn it; paid by men who spend their days in dust and darkness to win it. There is not a day of their lives they do not give two hours, stolen from the sunlight, to pay these exactions. They come up to seek rest and restoration, and they find crowded houses unfit for human habitation. Landlords exercise more despotic sway in their little dominions than the King does in any quarter of his huge Empire. They can deprive a man of his livelihood, or his opinions. What king can do that? They can exile a man from the home of his fathers, a home consecrated by every tradition, and all because of his political or religious opinions. They have done it! . . . I will tell you what is the matter with this country. There is one limited monarchy here, but also ten thousand little Tsars. They hold absolute autocratic sway. Who gave it to them? We mean to examine the conditions. That was what I meant by

broadening the basis of taxation."—*Mr. Lloyd George at Swansea, May 28th, 1912.*

"But we do intend that the taxation of site value shall henceforth form an integral part of the system of local taxation."—*Mr. Lloyd George, House of Commons, May 14th, 1914.*

Apart from the war with all its engrossing duties and exactions, including the swift but not altogether unexpected change of Government, and the rumblings of peace in the distance, the most striking feature of the day is the discussion that rages round the land question. If the war is to continue, and the signs of peace are not by any means reassuring, we are threatened with a scarcity of food. In these circumstances there has naturally arisen from all parts of the country a passionate cry for land, coupled with a stern demand on the part of agricultural experts for the necessary labour to cultivate it. The fighting forces by land and sea and the financial stability of the nation must be maintained, but not at the expense of food production.

The people have grown restless over the increase in the price of food, and the Government are being forced into all kinds of drastic-looking schemes, quite regardless of the claims of ownership. "We are a beleaguered city," the new President of the Board of Agriculture declares from his place in the Commons, and every available acre in country and town alike is to be put to use. And for this purpose the Defence of the Realm Act has been put into operation and local authorities are authorised to annex the land within their boundaries for cultivation. As a result all kinds of acres in odd-looking corners, and out in the open, square miles have been taken out of cold storage. In pre-war days this abundance of broad acres ready to be used when the word was given, had only a paper existence, in the literature of the land reformers, and they were regarded as impossible dreamers, or worse. When it was resolved at conferences that the land should be liberated from the grip of the monopolist, the reply made was that all land was being put to use, except derelict land. At conventional farmers' meetings, organised and directed by land surveyors and land agents, any mere suggestion that the land of England was badly used and held out of use for the pleasure of the rich was met by a perfect howl of derision.

At the beginning of our propaganda for a just system of land tenure, a system where the engrosser and the withholder of land would be penalised and not the industrious producer, by oppressive rates and taxes, there was a legend going round in somewhat picturesque language that the landlords could be bought out, kicked out, or taxed out. In due course the taxation

method appealed to the politicians and the sweet reasonableness of the plan made headway up and down the country. The municipalities joined in the demand for two good and sufficient reasons, namely, to place the burden of local rates on a fairer basis, and to get quickly and effectively at the main cause of bad housing conditions. The pace on these well-defined lines was well maintained for quite a decade. Municipal conferences were held and Bills were drafted, which, when they were debated in Parliament met with the support of both Liberals and Tories. This brilliant campaign constitutes, in itself, one well-placed chapter in the history of the land values movement.

The Liberal Government, or the Coalition part of it just gone to its last resting place, came into existence eleven years ago, pledged to the hilt that they would tax land values. Whatever else they failed to do this one step they would take. The slogan of the 1906 election was: The land should no longer be held as the pleasure ground of the few but as the treasure house of the nation. So it was in the bond. The indispensable first step was to be valuation so that a contribution would be levied upon the value declared for the needs of the State, and as a means to the overthrow of a monopoly that was at once a barrier to decent housing conditions and a menace to all local progress. "Here," said Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman in one of his inspiring declarations, "you have, perhaps, the clearest example in present politics of the cardinal, abiding, and necessary difference between the Liberal Party and our opponents. It is here that lies the chasm yawning between us, athwart almost every public question." This great radical leader gave proof beyond question that had he lived he would have been true to the pledges given by the party he led in triumph out of a twenty years' sojourn in the wilderness. In his last public speech he said: "This Land Values Bill is a small Bill, but the subject is not small and the reform is not trifling. The need of it comes home to every man among you. I know therefore that you will support us in the firm demand which we shall repeat that the remedy be applied without delay."

These words were spoken eleven years ago and the pledge has still to be redeemed.

Mr. Asquith at that time asked the Municipalities for time to consider the problem rather than present them with some piecemeal instalment. He now passes, perhaps for ever, from place and power with hands empty of even a decent-looking piecemeal measure.

Our new Prime Minister, Mr. Lloyd George, once told the Liberals that they handled the land question

as if it were a hedgehog. He was doubtless thinking of parliamentary Liberals, his colleagues in the Cabinet, and the permanent officials in the background, for on the platform he and other Liberal leaders could handle the land question as a hunger-driven wolf would handle a lamb. They could examine it, as they often did, and explain its parts to an admiring public that could always be relied upon to draw the swift inference that the party was determined to make a square deal of it, all round.

Eleven years is a long time to wait, but something stands to the good. Mr. Lloyd George, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, reviewing the normal finances of the year, May 4th, 1914, referring to the new valuation said:—

"It has the advantage of obtaining the capital value of the whole subject, separating sites and improvements, and also the advantage of getting the real annual value as well as the capital value, so that it will be adapted to the present method of taxation upon the annual value of the composite subject, as well as taxation upon the basis of the capital value of the site. It would not be a very considerable task to adapt the present valuation to a system of local taxation. The machinery has been set up, the staff has been organised; a very able staff in every centre. The vast majority of the hereditaments of this country have already been surveyed and inspected, all the necessary information with regard to them has been collected, and boundaries have been ascertained for the first time."

It is clear that there is nothing in the way of a tax on land values, but the will to take the necessary action. If there was a case before for this special levy on land monopoly, it is a thousand times more pressing to-day. The cost of the war mounts up and there is no good reason why this publicly-earned land value should, as such, escape the vigilance of a Chancellor looking around for additional sources of revenue. In the long run the bill must be paid by industry or by monopoly, or by both. The old-time plea that the land could not be taxed until its value was revealed no longer holds. The Prime Minister has said so, in so many words. The taxation of land values stands for more than revenue. It is the surest and speediest means to the production of wealth in all its various and varying branches. The Land and Housing Acts of the late Liberal administration could only harden the hearts of the men with acres enough and to spare. The needs of the hour call for the more radical measure. If the Defence of the Realm Act can be used, as it is being used, for so many schemes and plans in the public interest, why can it not be called to the service of the land valuation department?

J. P.

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#### A JOSEPH FELS CALENDAR FOR 1917

We are indebted to Mr. Walter Coates for this very practical all-the-year-round reminder of the case for land reform. Each day and date as it comes along reveals some text or statement from Henry George, Joseph Fels, and other leaders in the Single Tax movement. The permanent feature of the Calendar is the picture of Joseph Fels taken at the Cardiff Conference, October, 1913: