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THE LAW OF PROGRESS

"Mind is the instrument by which man advances, and by which each advance is secured and made the vantage ground of new advances. Though he may not by taking thought add a cubit to his stature, man may by taking thought extend his knowledge of the universe and his power over it, in what, as far as we can see, is an infinite degree.

"Mental power is therefore the motor of progress, and men tend to advance in proportion to the mental power expended in progression—the mental power which is devoted to the extension of knowledge, the improvement of methods and the betterment of social conditions.

"To compare society to a boat. Her progress through the water will not depend upon the exertion of the crew but upon the exertion devoted to propelling her.

"This will be lessened by any expenditure of force required for bailing, or any expenditure of force in fighting among themselves, or in pulling in opposite directions.

"Here is the Law of Progress, which will explain all diversities, all advances, all halts, all retrogressions. Men tend to progress just as they come closer together, and by co-operation with each other, increase the mental powers that may be devoted to improvement, but just as conflict is provoked, or association develops inequality of condition and power, this tendency to progression is lessened, checked, and finally reversed.

Henry George in *Progress and Poverty* (Book X., Chap. III.).

The extension of the franchise in Great Britain, whereby some five million women, between twenty-one and thirty years of age, are given the nominal degree of citizenship is announced by the Government. The second reading of the Bill was carried on Thursday, 29th March, by a vote of 387 to 10. It marks the final development in this line of progress, but it does not mean triumphant democracy; it does not herald the dawn of a new day when every man (and woman) shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, none daring to make him afraid. In the past such political advances

have carried their own cargoes of Dead Sea fruit, and to-day the excitement that comes of great expectations seems more the concern of political organizers who are busy enough taking the measurements of this new force for party ends. For the rest, not even the journalists can find time or space to doctor up this extension of the right to vote into a leap in the dark.

As a writer in the *Observer* asks, "What have we to fear if the Bill of 1928 becomes law?" What indeed! After 1832, we are reminded, 4.6 per cent of the population had the vote; after 1868, 9 per cent; after 1885, 16 per cent; after 1918, 49 per cent; after 1928, perhaps 55 per cent. And as if to reassure his public that nothing will come of this step likely to interfere with the stability of the State, the writer naively remarks that after all the interests of women are identical with those of men. These sentiments, expressed in the most popular newspaper on the Conservative side of things, speak for a conquest of political power that few could imagine possible half a century ago, or less, when liberal ideas were at work undermining the stubborn and stupid conservative resistance to a further widening of the franchise.

It is from Conservative platforms that we now learn that this granting of the vote to younger women is a mere act of justice. It would be an act of grace on the part of the Conservatives were they to confess that this final instalment of political justice is the triumph of liberalism, a triumph which they have done their best to impede and oppose save when they had no alternative but to bend to the breeze. Perhaps this goes without saying. But whatever be the accepted view of the evolution, the fact is that the adopted plan of casting the vote has no moral relationship to democratic ideals. The theory is that the majority must rule, but the dice are loaded against any well-timed expression of opinion. The present Government holds office on a basis of a minority of the votes polled at the general election. It is a scandalous and a sinister anomaly and until it is remedied, one way or another, what goes into the ballot boxes can bear no relation to what comes out, in representation at St. Stephens.

The Prime Minister, seeking to justify the Conservative Party's acceptance of this latest addition to the register, softens the blow to his "die-hards," by assuring them that Democracy is on its trial and that after all it is only one form of Government; "the new catchword for them" he declared, "was to make Democracy safe for the world." It will take more than a "catchword" to put Democracy by way of well-doing. The civilized world has reached its full political status only to discover that the end of the hard road is as disappointing as any of the stopping places on the way. In our time men have gone wild with enthusiasm under the spell of the orator who has held before his audience the higher possibilities of our social life, once the people, without qualification, were given the right to make a Parliament after their own mind and conscience. The dream has not become the realization, and as the new recruits prepare for their first visit to the polls the cynic

jeeringly points to the Communism and the Dictatorship already usurping the place of ordered progress.

In origin, character and incidence the problems facing society are economic and not political, and unless, and until, this truth is recognized the mere exercise of voting strength, however it may be directed, will not alter the situation. Poverty cannot be financed out of the way so long as the economic cause of it is at work. There is manifestly no solution in subsidies, or evil housing conditions, unemployment and bad trade would by this time have shown signs of improvement. The poverty that springs from a denial of the right to work for a living may be mitigated by the make-shift of grants-in-aid; but if the source of the disorder is to go unchallenged, what hope is there of any escape from the prevailing and growing discontent? The unrest and the suspicion that are engendered in economic inequality create the friction that keeps the boat from going forward.

The World Economic Conference, the international bankers, and the International Chamber of Commerce have had their conversations on the use and the abuse of the tariff walls of Europe. These barriers to Economic Democracy have been surveyed and condemned by these bodies but so far nothing has happened; yet, as one of the chiefs of this halting crusade said to the members of the Paris Chamber of Commerce, last month: "With trade and commerce unshackled, Europe would rise up from the disasters of the great war more powerful and prosperous than she had ever been." This is the free trade principle and in the hands of our free traders, limited, it is impaled on walls that in the opinion of the bankers are slowly strangling Europe. There is no immediate solution, we are told, except what is to be found in time and patience; fatalism speaks for leadership and the legal obstacles to general prosperity are tolerated in the interest of established greed and indolence.

There is an immediate solution. It has been brought before the various bodies named above by the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade, only to be contemptuously cast aside as a policy that could have no countenance from them. Evidently our conventional free traders want a cure that will hurt nobody's feelings nor lessen the pressure of the monopoly that holds trade and commerce to ransom. Let us not delude ourselves. In the stream of events to-day the principle embraced in the right to economic freedom is about as far removed from the platform of organized privilege as the right to vote was a century ago. But thought is on the wing, and the idea that the bounties of the Creator must continue to be hired out for private gain is seen to be slipping from its moorings into the open sea of opinion, not so much for the purpose of abstract argument, but rather for judgment as a habit of thought that is at variance with the moral law of progress.

Political democracy, if it is to be made safe for the world, must express itself in economic freedom; in bondage to the vested interests nothing but chaos and ill-will can come of its efficiency. It

seems a hard lesson to learn but an unjust land system can only induce an inequitable distribution of wealth and power, and what is wanting in our statesmanship is the simple recognition of this elementary truth. The value or rent of land is a communal value and its confiscation by private persons and classes means the enrichment of them and the corresponding impoverishment of the community. No industrial equipment, no human ingenuity, can better the condition of things while land monopoly and land speculation exist to mop up the surplus, and to force millions of citizens to search in vain for employment.

There is no limit to the beneficence of nature, and the crime of poverty lies with the institution that in all countries narrows the field of human endeavour. The land value principle and policy stands for the fullest measure of freedom to produce as well as to exchange goods and services, and it can be put into operation at once, in all lands. It will reveal to each country a knowledge of its own economic and financial resources, and incidentally show the folly of maintaining expensive and irritating barriers to outside trade. The land value policy will bring people of all nations together in international amity and peace. It is the essential first step to Economic Democracy and without it there is nothing for society but the law of the jungle.

J. P.

THE LIBERAL INDUSTRIAL INQUIRY

A book of 498 pages dealing with "Britain's Industrial Future" was recently issued as a report of a committee named "The Liberal Industrial Inquiry." The recommendations have been submitted to a special Liberal Convention held in London on 27th to 29th March, and the general scheme of things has been approved by that gathering. It appears that industry is to be managed and instructed by super-men, and shown its shortcomings with the help of statistics and accountants. The book is a veritable catalogue of solutions "that cannot be easy or simple," outlining legislation that would take generations of Parliaments to accomplish—and near the end, on a solitary page, some few words are said about the "rating of site values," proposing to transfer to the site value "a fair share of the rates now imposed upon the composite value of the land and the buildings which it carries." This transfer, however, of the obscure "fair share" is to take place only after the local rate-burden itself has been considerably reduced by relief provided out of the National Exchequer at the expense of the general taxpayer. In effect, the share of the public revenue obtainable by this site value rating, that has to wait upon the new burdens imposed on business or trade by the Treasury, would be limited indeed.

As to the bulk of this bulky document, we must let some reflections stand over. It would be a weary task to look at, much less examine, all those projects that have so little relation to the facts of the case—that industry is not free; that now, as always, before the war came to afflict Europe and the world, or cause disturbance in foreign markets, "every permanent improvement of the soil," as the late Professor Thorold Rogers wrote, "every railway and road, every bettering of the general condition of society, every facility given for production, every stimulus applied to consumption, raises rent; the landowner sleeps but thrives; he alone,