

LAND VALUES

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Editorial Offices:

The United Committee for the Taxation
of Land Values,

11, Tothill Street, London, S.W.1.

Telegrams: "Eulav, Vic, London."

Telephone: Victoria 7323.

All communications to be addressed to the Editor.

"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 MAIN OBSTACLE TO PEACE

"A civilisation like ours must either advance or go back; it cannot stand still. It is not like those homogeneous civilisations, such as that of the Nile Valley, which moulded men for their places and put them in it like bricks into a pyramid. It much more resembles that civilisation whose rise and fall is within historic times, and from which it sprang. . . .

"Yet it is evident that there have been times of decline, just as there have been times of advance; and it is further evident that these epochs of decline could not at first have been generally recognised.

"He would have been a rash man who, when Augustus was changing the Rome of brick to the Rome of marble, when wealth was augmenting and magnificence increasing, when victorious legions were extending the frontier, when manners were becoming more refined, language more polished, and literature rising to higher splendours—he would have been a rash man who then would have said that Rome was entering her decline. Yet such was the case. . . .

"What has destroyed every previous civilisation has been the tendency to the unequal distribution of wealth and power. This same tendency, operating with increasing force, is observable in our civilisation to-day, showing itself in every progressive community and with greater intensity the more progressive the community."—
PROGRESS AND POVERTY—Book x. Chap. iv.

The much talked of General Election has passed into history. The people were taken in a mood of passion and as on former similar occasions they have voted the reactionaries into place and power. The vote was not so overwhelming as the representation in the Commons appears to indicate at first sight; yet, making due allowance for the incomplete and anomalous condition of our electoral machinery, the fact remains that the progressive forces in our politics have suffered an impressive defeat.

In August, 1914, the political life of the country was suspended and the banner was raised: while we are at war the laws are silent. That only meant

we got a new set of laws which we struggled with as best we could these past four and a half years. The war raided our politics and entrenched the monopolists and the profiteers. The election is the natural outcome of the war and its circumstances. Had the election been deferred for six months, and there were powerful arguments advanced for that course, the vote would have been different and so would the Parliament. But even so, what would have happened? The war had ended, but was there anything to show that the defeated candidates who stood for election could or would have overcome the main difficulties in the way of sound reconstruction and peace? Was there any essential difference between the policy advocated by Mr. Asquith and the programme put before the country by Mr. Lloyd George? Mr. Asquith himself gave the answer to this question when he said: There was nothing in the policy the Prime Minister had outlined which he could not accept. As to the terms of the Peace settlement there was no division of opinion, or so little that it is not worth mentioning. In his comprehensive-looking schemes of reconstruction Mr. Lloyd George was not having any Limehouse confiscation. In those days the story was that the landlords had bled the people white; to-day, notwithstanding the high-sounding declamations of ten years ago, the extortion must continue. The angle of vision was altered, we presume, when the discovery was made that Thomas Atkins, labourer, paid rent to an English lord, and not to any foreigner. That settled the matter. Land purchase would merely be ringing the changes as between one Englishman and another; land taxation was but a memory of a forgotten past that lay buried in the ruins of the Liberal Valhalla. The territorial landlords in the Corn Production Act had received a considerable subvention. But that was for corn, only; for houses and industry the ground landlords must have their share of the plunder.

Mr. Asquith, of course, was in cordial agreement. He had no criticism to offer, nor any alternative policy. Urged by some of his organisers with an eye to votes he did screw up enough stage courage at his Glasgow meeting to mumble some incantations about national expenditure and the need for some kind of rate on land. This he declared was still a burning question. In his hands it has burned the light of Liberalism low enough.

As for the Labour party leaders they stated the case for a tax on land values in their manifesto to the electors so that its best friends could scarcely recognise it, though like the Liberals at their party conferences the resolutions carried were bold and uncompromising to a degree. Some few Labour candidates, like some few Liberals, made the question prominent in their election campaign. The others professed indifference as to whether the landlords were taxed out, bought out, or otherwise dismissed, so long as the land was restored to the people.

The fighting men had gone out in defence of the land, but when the fighting ended they were to return as they had left, landless. If they aspired to a patch of ground and to a decent house fixed on an idle half-acre where there was light and sunshine, the same old monopoly price had to be paid. Before our volunteer Army and our conscripts set out to meet the foe they were shown by the Government a striking picture of a soldier taking leave of a home with a garden bearing the inscription: "Is This Worth Fighting For?" To millions of sailors and soldiers from the overcrowded slums this was at once a piece of grim humour and a dream to be realised. This fetching poster was the work of our politicians, and now they talk and plan as if they were determined that the dream shall not become the realisation. Those were the glorious recruiting days when the question of the recruits paying for the land when the fighting was over was quite an after consideration. Anyone who ventured the claim of the men to a share, even a small share, in the land was reckoned a troublesome character, an enemy of his country, a pacifist if not a pro-German.

But the war is ended and the Housing-of-the-People question presses for solution. The claim for immediate action is admitted, but there must be no confiscation. In plain English that means there must be no Land Values Taxation to compel the monopolists to let go the idle acres they still hold to ransom. It is as if the landowners and their political agents together had kept the ruthless invader from his known designs, and worse. Verily, our politics are strangely out of tune with the spirit and the intention of the forces now gathering to determine the new adjustments.

So much for these wayside fruits of the war. Let us look at the one grand hope that arises out of the ashes of the great devastation, the League of Nations. What is it but an inspiration set in the clouds, where it must remain so long as the existing economic dispensation prevails? We search in vain through the writings and the speeches of the leaders of this new crusade for any recognition of this fundamental truth.

Behind the longings and aspirations for the great Peace lies the problem of getting a living. No question is settled until this is settled. It is the bottom question. The land, the storehouse that "Nature owes to man for the daily supply of his daily wants" has been parcelled out by Kings, Emperors and Parliaments, and sold for a price at the public auction rooms like so much private property. Robbed of their natural right to the use of this storehouse, the opportunity for peaceful industry, men gather at the gates of any kind of factory open to them. Millions in a Europe so conditioned get their living in the making of armaments, and in its dependent industries.

It is officially stated that in 1914, Britain, Russia, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy spent among them £390,330,361 on armaments. The

mass of men who get their living in and through this huge industry have none other to turn to for employment; very many have been specially trained by the Schools to fit them for the higher-grade positions in the great arsenals and ship-building centres. This is where the opinion that supports and maintains the Balance of Power policy is to be found. This is what stands athwart the League of Nations and reduces the idea even in the hands of its most competent votaries to a meaningless formula. Even now, at the very birth of the idea championed by the greatest democratic leader in sight, the passionate cry is heard from all quarters of the globe that it is a lost cause. Blame for this is hurled as usual at the heads of men who stand or who seem to stand for the opposing principle. Not a word nor a single sign to indicate that the cause of the failure is to be found at the bedrock on which society itself rests.

In some quarters optimism turns to pessimism, and human nature, poor, misunderstood and much maligned human nature, stands charged with a due share of the failure to rise to the great occasion. Amid all this grief and lamentation the plain truth is before us. The problem is mainly economic and not altogether a question of politics. The getting of a living is the dominating factor, and so long as it exists will provide the atmosphere and the opinion which petrifies and circumvents those who strive so diligently for a sound and enduring Peace system. Our well-intentioned peacemakers are up against a hard stern fact born of human needs. Men with bodies to feed and clothe cannot freely step into the hell of unemployment to satisfy the cravings of their higher nature or respond much to an appeal for any high purpose. If that were not so war and the lust for war would have been banished long ago. If we would have peace we must first have justice.

Let us give human nature a chance; let us emancipate man from the bondage of economic slavery and then look with assurance for the opinion that will abolish the armament industry. So long as men must regard work as an end in itself instead of as a means to the higher life, and natural avenues to alternative employment are shut in the face of those who must find work or starve, we shall preach in vain about the urgency of a League of Nations. The fundamental question of the restoration of the land to the people must first be dealt with. The unequal distribution of wealth which property in land determines will hold men firmly to the lower levels of thought.

What is wrong with the world can still be named: ignorance, contempt and neglect of human rights. Let Nature's wide field for human progress be set free; let wages rise to full earnings point; let the workers feel they are not any longer on the verge of starvation, that they need take no thought for the morrow; let the just claims to a fuller life be recognised; let the slogan of Liberalism, equality

of opportunity, remain no longer the cold abstraction it is; let the pace be set for a co-operative commonwealth. This is the way we must travel if we would have the great Peace League in our day and generation.

This was the task of the party that stood for Liberal principles, for the Liberalism that made for peace and prosperity. It was not equal to the call and has fallen by the way. The General Election has put the Liberal Party out of action, but in our judgment the party stood for defeat in 1914, before the war broke out. In 1906 the Liberals were returned to power pledged to the hilt to commence the process of restoring the land to the people. The land was no longer to remain the pleasure-ground of the rich; it was to become the treasure-house of the nation. The people were to "enter into their inheritance from on high" and on terms that they could call their soul their own; the land was to be taxed at its market value; the dog-in-the-manger was to be ousted and the building trade relieved of the crushing burden of the rates. Liberal leaders, place hunters, organisers and all sorts of camp followers expounded the new doctrine while the Liberal central headquarters vied with the Land Values Leagues in supplying the explanatory literature. It was a soul-stirring campaign directed in the House of Commons and in the country by Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman. Two years later the great democrat passed to his long rest, his last public utterance being devoted to the Taxation of Land Values.

Mr. Asquith became Prime Minister and leader of the party. The Radical policy was side-tracked and the one adopted, instead of relieving the pressure on housing, made for hardening the monopoly which had been so trenchantly exposed as the direct cause of the trouble. It was a piece of botchwork through and through. As the outcome of this legislation the fortunes of the party commenced to wane. The Land Question was again brought to the front, but this time there was to be no land values taxation. The "spell binders" engaged for the campaign were told to keep off the subject, and Mr. Lloyd George at his bigger demonstrations led the way in keeping the Limehouse policy in cold storage. The impossible had clothed itself in fact and gone through the hollow mockery of taking place. And this *volte face* was accomplished with the sanction and the approval of Mr. Asquith and his pro-landlord Cabinet.

These eight years of place and power, 1906 to 1914, were quite enough to prove that the Liberal party richly deserved the fate that has overtaken it. A Liberal ex-M.P., writing to a Liberal paper, says:—"Liberalism will not be destroyed by the result of one scrambled and apathetic election. She has suffered worse blows before. She has the secret of immortality. She will certainly return." Liberalism

has certainly not been destroyed; not even a Liberal Government could put living principles out of action. But Liberalism and the Liberal party are not just one and the same thing. The party was not equal to the needs of the day and those whom it betrayed, the great body of the common people, have cast it on to the scrap heap. It is now clearly perceived and admitted that for all that was achieved from 1906 to 1914 the Tories might just as well have been in power. This, of course, was the will of the rich and powerful supporters of the Liberal party and its Whig leaders at the council board. Nor is there any hope that if the same party were placed in power again, it could or would take any step to emancipate the people from the bondage of monopoly.

J. P.

OUR MANIFESTO

The £25,000 Campaign Fund

The Manifesto, "THE LAND FOR THE PEOPLE," which we published last month, and which was widely advertised in the daily and weekly Press, concluded in these words:—

A Special Fund of £25,000 is required by the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values to maintain its propaganda and to carry the cause of "Land and Liberty" to an issue. We earnestly appeal to all in favour of the principles of social justice and economic freedom embodied in this Manifesto to give us now the fullest measure of their financial support and active interest.

We are gratified to say that the appeal has not been in vain. It has encouraged many to give who have given before, often in generous measure. It has been the occasion for special and for increased donations. This welcome response, in sums large and small, has also come from numerous new friends in many parts of the country, from whose future active interest we hope to get much practical assistance in the propaganda. But the fund we require in order to force the issue—after due consideration of all the needs of the case we have deliberately placed the amount at £25,000—is far from having been collected. We want that sum for urgent, determined and widespread agitation. We want it in order to undertake educative work by every legitimate means, by a national campaign of mass meetings and demonstrations, by local and district conferences such as we have already held with Trade Unions and other bodies, by the door-to-door distribution of literature, by setting up agencies where none exist, and by making it possible for the United Committee and the existing Leagues to respond to demands on their energies in every direction.

We therefore earnestly repeat and renew our appeal. We confidently call for assistance upon all who have the cause of "Land and Liberty" at heart and who approve of our means to achieve industrial freedom—the taking by taxation of the economic rent of land for public uses. Subscriptions and donations may be sent to Mr. W. R. Lester, Hon. Treasurer of the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values, 11, Tothill Street, London, S.W.1.