

LAND & LIBERTY

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NEW OCCASIONS AND NEW DUTIES

The chief result of the December 1923 Election is to bring the prospect of a Labour Government sooner than most people expected. When the new Parliament meets, this new orientation in our politics is as certain as anything can be in these times of rolling up old maps, political, as well as geographical. With few exceptions, and these few are at a discount, it is the settled opinion of the Press, the politicians, and our old friend "the man in the street" that the Labour Party just returned to the House of Commons are to have the chance of bringing order out of chaos. With a stroke of luck in the form of good guidance, and the goodwill they are already promised, something should happen likely to strengthen their position in the country and enhance their reputation all round the globe.

A second like unto this Labour advance is the rout of the Protectionists. In a fit of distraction the Baldwin Government, safe in office for at least three years, challenged the accepted fiscal policy of the country and now they are out of the saddle. Their own best friends who banked on the "gambler's throw" appear to be staggered by the result, and some are in a state of repentance, if not in sackcloth and ashes. But the step cannot be retraced, and the future, emphatically, is with those who stand at home and abroad for more freedom and not less.

The Protectionist's programme, as of old time, contained the promise of work for the unemployed by the restriction, or prohibition, of imports. The money to be derived from the tariff on the goods, which were at the same time to be kept out of the country, was on this occasion earmarked to subsidize the agricultural industry, in other words the territorial landlords. The Corn Production Acts of 1917 and 1922, which cost the taxpayers some £20,000,000 were not enough for the greed of landlordism. These Acts were put forward in the interest of the cultivator, but the farmer and his workers can tell how the benefits passed their doors. The farmers have had enough of subsidies; what they want is security of tenure and freedom, not from the foreign competitor, but from the penalizing home tariff on their improvements and the exactions of the landowner. In many rural contests the "tariff reform" candidates were rendered helpless, and in some cases speechless, in the questions put by the awakened and enlightened jury. The verdict

given by these constituencies was a revelation, to the farmers who farm the farmers.

In his attempt to square the circle Mr. Baldwin, the "healer," had the advantage of the late Mr. Bonar Law's "two bad winters." But the schoolmaster has been busy enough these past twenty years and the unemployed also saw through the "swindle." The Protectionist game is not likely to be played again by the grafters and their dupes for at least a lifetime. As their friend THE SPECTATOR says: "They have been handsomely beaten and it is now up to the Unionist leaders in a plain way to reassure the people by a whole-hearted repudiation of any desire to disturb the principle of Free Trade as part of our national policy." It is the knockout blow to the filibustering profiteers who came from the Dominions to the Imperial Conference with their faked-up mandate to link up the weak spots in the Empire by heavier taxation on the consumer. Their sordid appeal has been flung back in their brazen faces with a due and an appropriate measure of reprobation and contempt. They now return to their respective stations across the seas with nothing to show to their friends but the receipts for their out of pocket expenses. The bells may ring on their arrival, but in each and every case the Free Traders will know best how to appreciate the music.

We may well rejoice over the verdict just given by the British people, for had these advance agents of legalized piracy won the day it would have meant not only reaction, but the paralysis of every democratic hope and aspiration. As it is, those who stand the world over for clean politics and for international peace and goodwill can now look forward to the immediate future with renewed assurance. The menace of economic and political reaction has been removed from our door and Free Traders in every land can again "take up the task eternal, and the burden and the lesson." Already there are signs in Europe of a Free Trade revival.

"Do everything you can," a continental correspondent wrote, "to keep England for Free Trade; it is now your time to help us in our struggle against the detestable and powerful tariff interests." Messages in similar terms came from the Dominions, *pace* our Imperial Conference freebooters, and from the United States. Our friends in countries with some measure of Land Value Taxation, yet labouring under Protection, can tell how the robber tariff cancels out the advantages of their freer land system. We have been mercifully saved from a similar experience.

But the Election has not only been a striking victory for free imports. It has been, as we show in this issue, a victory as well for Land Values Taxation, the complement to Free Trade in exchange. Quite a third of the new House of Commons consists of members personally pledged to the policy that would put new life and vigour into the case for real Free Trade and without which Protection will raise its head again. If our fiscal policy is to survive, freedom to produce as well as to exchange must be put in practice.

In the course of the great debate on the hustings, the question of unemployment figured as one of paramount importance; naturally, the Government having put forward their schemes and bribes as a

cure for this economic monstrosity. Protectionists charged the Free Traders with heartlessness, in that they showed no regard for the thousands of workers who would be employed, here and there, if certain goods were prohibited from coming in through our ports. To this the Free Trader answered that other thousands of workers were busily engaged in making and exporting other goods as payment for the imports, and that the tariff reformer merely proposed to disemploy one set of workers in favour of another set. To the unemployed man it was apparent that he did not come in at any point; to him there was heartlessness on either or on both sides of the argument. The unemployed stood over the combatants like a cloud which neither disputant could penetrate. And that is why the candidates who stood for the Taxation of Land Values were returned in such numbers to the Commons. In 1914 there were fewer Members of Parliament than there are to-day pledged to the concrete policy the Land Values movement has fashioned for Parliamentary action.

Will the Labour Government redeem their promise to re-equip the Land Valuation Department for an immediate levy on the publicly earned value of land? That is the question. They said so in their Manifesto to the Electors, and when the Government scrapped the Land Valuation Department six months ago, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald declared: "they (the Government) know that if the decision of the country is that a Government is to come in with that (Taxation of Land Values) in its programme, that, valuation or no valuation, it is going to be carried out." Other Labour members who took part in the debate were equally emphatic, Mr. Snowden saying: "the destruction of the Department by the Tory Party was worth at least 50 seats to the Labour Party at the next General Election." The Labour Party secured the 50 seats. They surely possess the wisdom of knowing how to keep them.

We are told that when the King asks Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, the leader of the Labour Party, for assurances that he will be able to carry on as Prime Minister, the most probable reply of Mr. MacDonald will be to submit a programme that will command the support of a majority of the House of Commons. The next consideration is the programme. Whatever it may contain, the Budget for the year must be tabled. The Levy on Capital in the Labour Manifesto has been for the time being, at least, turned down as effectively as Protection has been cast out of the Tory Party, and the next item of importance is the promised tax on land values, in lieu of certain other revenue at present derived from taxes on food, entertainments, etc. That policy occupied a prominent place in the Labour Manifesto to the electors, and it is one that we are told would command the support of all Liberals. If we are to go by experience we are not so sure of some Liberals; but there are others, and they count both numerically and in understanding, who would eagerly welcome a Budget tax on land values.

Mr. Neil Maclean (Labour), M.P. for Govan, in a speech at Glasgow, 23rd December, said:—

The test of every question brought forward by a Labour Government must be—Is this measure going to increase the standard of comfort of the people, and how far is it going to drive poverty,

destitution and misery from the homes of many thousands. Dare the Liberals vote against the abolition of food taxes, proposals to make the land more easily obtainable by the people? . . . The Labour Party could bring in proposals which would capture the imagination of four-fifths of the electorate of this country, and if the Liberals and Tories combined to defeat them, Labour would go back with an overwhelming majority.

Mr. Maclean's test is the only safe one for the Labour Party, and if it be applied so as to make land more easily obtainable, and to capture the imagination of the great body of the people, the Taxation of Land Values as a measure with these qualifications has no competitor in any other plank in the Labour programme.

A correspondent wrote the other day: "I know of a subscriber who is not over-pleased with your support of the Labour Party." Why this doubt? We are out for the policy without regard to any Party attachments. This has always been made clear, in this paper, at our public conferences and but yesterday at the Oxford International.

In our organization we have no official or financial connection with any political party. From the first Single Taxers were to be found in the ranks of both the Liberal and Labour parties; it is the same to-day, only more so. The cause we stand for must transcend the fortunes of any party; all we have to see to is that we hold ourselves free to help the party who would give the Taxation of Land Values its due and proper place in our politics. We have been bamboozled and cheated by one party already, but the shame, the humiliation and the failure is with that party and not with us. Our co-workers are still free to serve the cause through the party of their choice. The industrial and social effects of a Tax on Land Values as they appear in additional employment, higher wages and improved housing conditions, in communion with their moral and spiritual affinities will function for the commonweal apart from any partisan view of the matter!

There may be some who, belonging to the old "Individualism *versus* Socialism" school, seem to witness a falling off in any approach to Labour Party standing and prospects. If there be any whom these words should reach, may we direct their attention to Henry George's opinion on the question? "I neither claim nor repudiate the name, and realizing as I do the correlative truth of both principles, I can no more call myself an individualist or a socialist than one who considers the forces by which the planets are held could call himself a centrifugalist or a centripetalist." And again: "The natural process of social development is unmistakably toward co-operation, or if the word be preferred, towards socialism, though I dislike to use a word to which such various and vague meanings are attached. Civilization is the art of living together in closer relations." There is no sound reason to fear the "socialism" that would evolve out of the freedom the Land Values policy would make possible, and if the Labour Party make good to-day they should not look in vain for the sympathy and the support of those who stand for this defined measure of economic justice and freedom.

The House of Lords are still powerless in the

domain of finance. The Parliament Act on the point reads :—

If a Money Bill, having been passed by the House of Commons and sent up to the House of Lords at least one month before the end of the Session, is not passed by the House of Lords WITHOUT AMENDMENT within one month after it is so sent up to the House, the Bill shall, unless the House of Commons direct to the contrary, be presented to His Majesty and become an Act of Parliament on the Royal Assent being signified, notwithstanding that the House of Lords have not consented to the Bill.

The question whether the Land Valuation Department could be geared up at once is one for the Department itself to answer, but the idea is that with the experience already gained less than one year would suffice for a Valuation that could be at the service of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The case for land value taxation is stronger to-day than it was fifteen years ago when it was first made an issue and received, to the surprise of the Liberal leaders who had the matter in hand, such overwhelming public approval and support. The question in all its aspects is better understood, and its claim for precedence over all other economic or financial measures is as freely acknowledged. There is no alternative to the Taxation of Land Values as a means to the solution of the unemployed problem.

Lord Bledisloe, in recent speeches and in his condemnation of the existing system of penalizing the improver, has publicly reduced to impotence that alarmist body known as the Land Union. The Chelmsford electors have tired of Captain Pretymann's opposition to reform, and at North Finchley another of this pro-landlord group went down before a vigorous onslaught by Mr. Atholl Robertson, president of the English League for the Taxation of Land Values, a devoted and well-informed Single Taxer. Mr. Robertson won his election on the Taxation and Rating of Land Values.

The "Housing Act Farce" is a prominent headline of the WESTMINSTER GAZETTE, 21st December. We are told that only 2,500 completed houses have been built under the Chamberlain Act of 1923—the Act that was deliberately superimposed on all the preceding futile housing legislation on the same lines. It is said that 800,000 houses are still wanted and these must be forthcoming at the rate of 100,000 a year. The ARCHITECTS' JOURNAL of this week lays stress on the urgency of the problem. We have heard it all, over and over again, these past five years. Has the time not come to stress the incapacity of the housing muddlers wherever they are to be found?

The Secretary of the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association says (we quote from the WESTMINSTER GAZETTE): "Housing has become a definite State responsibility"; and at a Conference in London, 30th November, held under the auspices of the National Housing and Town Planning Council, Mr. Aldridge advocated the turning of unemployed labour on to road work. The cost, he said, could be met by loans over a period of 20 years. That is the way these self-appointed experts continue to talk with their ghastly failures staring them in

the face: 800,000 houses urgently wanted; empty building sites and idle men; land for new roads at a price "advanced from £50 to £300 an acre" to say nothing of the increased land value the new roads have induced on plots adjacent to the new roads. If the new Labour Ministry listens to these proved shallow-minded pioneers and planners of failure, and calls upon the taxpayer for more money for this kind of social reform, then nothing will happen, nothing but one more "Housing Act Farce."

It is apparent that the more money spent on these designs, the further we get from any abatement of the scandal of housing and unemployment. Why continue to tax houses and improvements and allow the valuable empty spaces and building sites to escape? And why not listen to the lesson of experience which plainly is that not by buying land for housing sites or roads can a solution of the problem be even approached.

Credit schemes are in vogue as a method of funding the money to feed the monopolists, "on terms that will not come up against the taxpayer, not just at present"; so the story goes. But the credits must be borrowed and at interest from the men who possess the substance of things. Those who own and control the land, command the credit this ownership carries. The wealth produced by labour is carried, often in unseen ways to that destination, and so are the credits. The people are entitled to the use of the land, and when this is their portion, the credits will be at their service, and only then. Capital, real and spurious, can also command credit, and the way to bring capital to the worker is to give him a chance to obtain it by bringing him into his natural inheritance. Both capital and credits come from the land, though some people talk and act as if the reverse were the truth of the matter.

If the Labour Government will boldly take up the Taxation of Land Values in this their hour of trial, and not let it go till a sound measure of the principle is passed into legislative enactment, they will win something substantial and lasting for housing, employment, and for all-round industrial progress. The Taxation of Land Values will penalize the monopolist and the idler. It will bring land quickly and cheaply to the service of labour. The opposing land-purchase policy can only make the separation of land from labour wider still and put more of the produce of labour into the hands of the non-producer. The Land Value Policy holds the field. The public opinion for it is to be found in every industrial centre, in every town and village, and the Party that deals with it honestly and faithfully will have a great and enduring reward.

J. P.

It is the general fact, observable everywhere, that as the value of land increases, so does the contrast between wealth and want appear. It is the universal fact that where the value of land is highest, civilisation exhibits the greatest luxury side by side with the most piteous destitution. To see human beings in the most abject, the most helpless and hopeless condition, you must go, not to the unfenced prairies and the log cabins of new clearings in the backwoods, where man single-handed is commencing the struggle with nature, and land is yet worth nothing, but to the great cities where the ownership of a little patch of ground is a fortune.—Henry George in PROGRESS AND POVERTY, Book III. chap. VIII.