

LAND & LIBERTY

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THE PRIMARY SOURCE OF NATIONAL REVENUE

This Conference, regarding the economic rent of land and minerals apart from improvements, as the primary source from which national revenue should be drawn, welcomes the proposal of the Government to restore the Land Valuation Department so improperly destroyed in 1923, and calls for the earliest possible introduction and passage into law of a measure for the Taxation of Land Values.—*Resolution to be submitted by the Executive Committee of the Labour Party at the 24th Annual Conference of the Labour Party, to be held at the Queen's Hall, London, on 7th October and three following days.*

Supporters of the Taxation of Land Values, everywhere, will welcome the plain and straightforward resolution to be submitted at the Annual Conference of the Labour Party. It is an official resolution tabled by the Executive of the Party. It should do something to reassure any doubting Thomas as to the intention of Labour headquarters to support the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he brings forward the proposals of the Government in his next Budget. It should also stimulate discussion throughout the Labour movement, and that is needed to bring light into dark corners, and to encourage the exponents of the reform within the Party, many of whom are having an uphill fight to maintain the policy and promote opinion for it as an important item in the Labour programme.

In his first speech in the House of Commons the Prime Minister said that the schemes of providing work for the unemployed put power in the hands of the owners of land to exact an increased rent out of the capital expenditure found by the nation at large, and added "that will have to be considered." The schemes are now at work enriching the landowners at the expense of the nation, but so far there is no definite word as to when the matter is to be considered. In a pamphlet entitled "Six Months of Labour Government" issued by the Independent Labour Party, we are told what the Labour Government is doing in this line of action for the unemployed. On main trunk roads £5,000,000 is to be spent; a further road programme approved amounting to £13,500,000, to which the Government contribution will be £10,400,000, and there is further exultation over millions more for electricity development, etc. There is also the special subsidy of 19s. 6d. per cwt. to the manufacturers of beet sugar, the Treasury approval for draining the basin of the Great Ouse, and municipal schemes for the coming winter amounting to £3,000,000.

Already the fortunes of the favoured landowners are bettered by hundreds of pounds an acre. The land is changing hands on these terms of pure exploitation and greed. The taxpayer is bled white in the first instance, and industrial enterprise and municipal expansion are duly victimized by the monopoly "hold up" (to quote the Prime Minister) in ransom prices for housing or any kind of improvement.

It is a flagrant and an aggravated species of predatory landlordism. It is on record that Robin Hood in his day intimated that anyone found ten miles beyond a given point with less than ten pounds in his possession was liable to be severely dealt with. That is the essence of the present road-making and house-building schemes invented to take in the unemployed. The political opponents of the Labour Party could not do as much for the land monopolists if they tried. Labour says emphatically it objects to the appropriation of the economic rent of land for private uses, but in its road-making and housing plans it continues to hand over to the land monopolists the just earnings of the community. "Socialism," says Mr. MacDonald, "does not oppose real (economic) rent; it only objects to rent belonging to private persons." Why, then, hesitate to give the public its due in the matter when there is a majority in the House of Commons for the practical policy?

It is evident, in reading through Mr. MacDonald's essay on rent, given in another column, that he does not see the economic implications of his own statement. In the much canvassed preface to the new edition of his book (*SOCIALISM: CRITICAL AND CONSTRUCTIVE*) he warns the trade unionist against seeking like the capitalist to advance his own interest at the expense of society; but an elementary understanding of true political economy goes to show that any advance in the wages and conditions that labour may win for itself is in the long run at the expense of economic rent and therefore does not injure society.

That is the underlying economic truth of the trades union movement, and if it were not so there would be no combination of workmen to support a Labour Government; the standard of living among the workers in general would be much lower than it is, and Mr. MacDonald's evolutionary Socialist would be putting some searching questions. Even now his revolutionary instincts are only held in check by public doles and subsidies in the teeth of the hard times that have driven wage earners below the margin of subsistence. Wages are what remains after the rent paid by labour for the use of land is taken by private persons or by Corporations for their own enrichment; and that explains why increase of productive power does not necessarily mean any advance in the condition of labour. And it further explains why land monopoly hold-ups are maintained and how unemployment and starvation are brought about.

The opportunities to employment are in the land and nowhere else. The great fallacy of our day which the Socialists have sedulously taught is that the ownership of capital is responsible for involuntary poverty. Capital is but a derivative and not a dominant factor in the production of wealth. Capital is produced from land by labour and no amount of preaching can make it otherwise. It is

not capital or capitalism with all its co-operative strength and influence, but the want of it, that compels the worker to render more service than he can command; and as Mr. MacDonald well says, it is not by strikes and such-like warfare that the worker will win full enfranchisement. His emancipation lies in that "mystical" definition of property which separates what God or nature provides from what man makes individually or collectively.

The crux of the unemployed problem and the misery it brings to the millions who suffer under its lash, and to the hurt of the nation at large, is to be found in the fundamental economic injustice that gives one man ten thousand acres and makes the rest of us dependent upon his will for leave of access to the primary raw materials of life and well-being. Land monopoly has to be met and overcome if we would enjoy the blessing of industrial peace and contentment. It can be said in all fairness that we owe it to the organized Socialists of the country that a knowledge of this simple truth has been kept from their adherents these past thirty years. "Late in life," said Mr. Robert Smillie, three years ago, "I have realized, what I failed to see in the early days, that the root of all our social troubles lies in the land question. So long as land is withheld from free access to men, anxious and willing to utilize nature's bounty, just so long will you have a crowd of men at the factory gate waiting for jobs. The key to the anomalies we are all endeavouring to solve is the land problem." The crowd are still hanging around as usual, numbered by the million, cursing a society they do not understand, and by their very presence fixing the wages of the men inside the gate as sure and as certain as every industrial improvement and increase of population increases the value of land. How tardily Mr. Smillie and his friends are making reparation to the workers they have so long misguided, is to be witnessed every day in their platform speeches and in their raids on the public purse to feed the monopoly. Their silence on the "key" to the solution of the unemployed problem is only comparable to their blind refusal to understand the working of economic law. We have every sympathy with the Government in the legacy they have inherited from the war politics of their war-minded predecessors, but unemployment is a thing apart and can be successfully mitigated by relieving economic pressure at home.

The elusive German indemnity has at last been ambushed. The goods are to be delivered, and, wonderful to be told, there is a universal growl of anger from every competing industry, employers and workers alike. Yesterday the bitter cry was the Germans must make reparation; four years ago the cry was they must pay to the last penny. And now when the settling day has arrived and the first delivery is in sight, the politicians are discussing ways and means of keeping out the consignment, or sending it elsewhere. The indemnity, we are told, spells more unemployment. The Prime Minister has appointed a committee of experts to consult with the Government on the question. "Industry welcomes the idea and the trades affected should be considered," is the headline in the daily press. The Chancellor of the Exchequer says: "The problem may arise as to whether the Allies will not find greater difficulty in receiving reparations than

Germany will experience in providing them," and he goes on "to warn British commercial interests, especially the textile and iron trades, to be alert in this matter." And so it comes about that politicians may fish for reparations in a distracted poverty-stricken Europe and when the catch is landed the market for it is nowhere to be found. It is like theatrical politics, and we can imagine how the Germans are enjoying the play!

In dealing with the Russian loan, if ever it transpires, Mr. Wheatley, the Minister of Health, said he thought it would be a good thing even if the money were never repaid, and that sentiment reveals the ramshackle economics of the public debate on the German indemnity. But what else can we expect from people who ignore or belittle the land question and who complacently look on idle acres and idle men as something akin to natural phenomena? As Henry George says in his SOCIAL PROBLEMS:—

"The difficulty which so many men who would gladly work to satisfy their needs find in obtaining opportunity of doing so, is so common as to occasion no surprise, nor, save when it becomes particularly intensified, to arouse inquiry. We are so used to it, that though we all know that work is in itself distasteful, and that there never yet was a human being who wanted work for the sake of work, we have got into the habit of thinking and talking as though work were in itself a boon. So deeply is this idea implanted in the common mind that we maintain a policy based on the notion that the more work we do for foreign nations and the less we allow them to do for us, the better off we shall be; and in public and in private we hear men lauded and enterprises advocated because they 'furnish employment,' while there are many who, with more or less definiteness, hold the idea that labour-saving inventions have operated injuriously by lessening the amount of work to be done."

Human wants and aspirations make the demand for work, and the direct cause of unemployment has been traced to the monopoly conditions that bar the way like a stone wall to industrial development. If the bounty of nature be denied to labour, as it is by monopoly hold-ups, society must right this wrong or pay the penalty. Organization, capacity and efficiency operating on restricted opportunities can only serve to enhance the value of land, lower the wages of labour, promote land speculation, and add to the volume of unemployment. So long as land monopoly is maintained it will absorb any subsidy for private gain, just as surely as in the past the economic results of all progress have been registered in higher land values.

The Prime Minister knows that a Government cannot create its own economic law; nor can it create a job for any idle man. The opportunities for employment are the gift of nature and all that is expected of any democratic government is to keep the gate open and see that labour has at all times ready access to its natural inheritance. The Taxation of Land Values will make this possible. It will also provide the State with a first instalment of its own communal earnings, and correspondingly liberate the earnings of the taxpayer from unjust and burdensome exactions. It is a reform that has been promised by the Government and by the political party it represents in the country.

But let us get back to the realities of the position. Mr. Snowden in his Budget speech on 29th April said the Cabinet hoped to introduce a short Bill to re-equip the Valuation Department. More than six months have passed and as yet there is no word of this measure. Parliament is about to re-assemble and the executive of the Labour Party itself demands the promised legislation. Speaking in the House on 27th May, Mr. Snowden said that there was no need for anyone to press him on the question. The Government has now the opportunity to show good faith and political wisdom. The "short Bill" would restore the power of the Valuation Department to register the particulars of sales and leases of land, so to keep in touch with market prices and other essential information. The introduction of the Bill at this stage will be an earnest of the Government's intentions to tax land values. It will rouse the great public sentiment in the country, ever ready to respond with enthusiasm to the clear declaration of a policy that aims at the liberation of industry from the power and influence of monopoly.

J. P.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE REPORT

GRUNDSKYLD, the monthly journal of our Danish co-workers, offers a cordial welcome to the Official Report of the 1923 International Conference on the Taxation of Land Values, and very heartily recommends it to all students of English in Denmark who wish to be better acquainted with Henry George's philosophy and the progress of Land Value Taxation as an international factor.

The INVERNESS CITIZEN of 21st August reviews the Report at considerable length and quotes the Declaration of Principle and Policy in full. The Report is described as an acquisition to every adherent of the Taxation of Land Values and a weighty contribution to the literature on the subject.

MAINE, U.S.A.—Many thanks for the Report of the Oxford Conference. Please accept the enclosed four shillings as a small contribution towards expenses.

BROADWAY, WORCESTER.—Please accept my thanks for the Report of Proceedings of the International Conference. It was just what was wanted, and will be ready to use at any time.

GLASGOW.—Enclosed find P.O. for 5s. which will help in a small way to clear the expense of publishing the Report of the proceedings at Oxford. It seems to have been a great success. Let us hope the effort will bear fruit, and that soon we may see signs of the harvest beginning to be reaped.

COPENHAGEN.—The six Reports of the International Conference you sent are all gone. I would like to have you send me five copies more. Payment is being posted. It is a splendid work for our movement.

CORNWALL.—The Report of the International Conference duly came to hand. This is a most interesting book and I am reading it now for the third time. Please note to send me any new literature that is published on the question. Enclosed is £5 for the benefit of the Taxation of Land Values.

"I must say how thankful I am for James Dundas White's LAND VALUE POLICY, published by you. It was enlightening, interesting and worth its weight in gold."—H. Pemberton, Clitheroe, Lancs.

NOTES AND NEWS

The Rev. J. T. Horton, Vicar of Holy Trinity, Bradford, speaking at a Conference of "Copec" held there on 16th September, referred to the slum life of the city and said he had a night call to a house where he found eight people of both sexes sleeping in one room. "Men drink," he said, "yes, and if I lived in hell I would rather live there drunk than sober. If I had to do the same thing every day at work I should want some excitement, and I should not think it very wicked to seek excitement in putting a bob on a horse." He added that it would seem to him nothing very wrong. It was the conditions that were wrong. They could not expect a woman who was for ever planning to make 19s. 11d. do the work of 30s. to tell her children great moral stories. It could not be done. That conference should not end in talking, but in trying to right the wrong conditions.—DAILY NEWS, 17th September.

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At the same conference the Bishop of Bradford, who was in the chair, asked speakers in the discussion not to waste time in condemning the present housing conditions. "We are all agreed," he said, "that they are abominable." A clerical delegate urged that municipalities should have the power to rate land values and to take rates off houses. A Harrogate delegate said that in connexion with his church a public utility society was about to be formed for building houses. There was no congregation of a decent size which could not form a society of this sort and add to the houses of the district.—THE TIMES, 17th September.

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One hundred and fifty acres of building land at Edgware were sold by Messrs. Knight, Frank and Rutley yesterday, for £63,300. Some of the land fetched £1,000 an acre. A few years ago nearly the whole of the land in the immediate vicinity had only an agricultural value.—DAILY CHRONICLE, 18th September.

In the interval, the electric railway has been extended from Golders Green to Edgware.

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Mr. P. Wilson Raffan, M.P. for North Edinburgh, delivered an address on the Taxation of Land Values at the Scottish Liberal Summer School at its session on Friday, 19th September.

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A Glasgow correspondent writes: "The author of the statement in the Commons, that the cost of land entered little into housing, has received such a dressing-down in the Press here since he made the statement that Labour M.P.'s who glorified him have had their eyes opened and many of the Labour rank and file have had nothing but congratulations for those who exposed the stupidity of the statement."

Our correspondent is referring to Mr. J. Wheatley, Minister of Health and Member for Shettleton, who said that the price of land was equivalent to only 1½d. a week in the rent of houses.

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The Trades Union Congress held at Hull last month rejected a resolution asking for an expression of opinion regarding the questions of Free Trade, Protection and Imperial Preference. Opposing the Resolution, Mr. G. McNamara (Wigan Weavers) said it was one of the most dangerous submitted to the Conference. The danger was not so much in what the resolution said but what it implied. It did not admit the principle of freedom internationally, commercially and industrially as between one nation and another. The British cotton trade was international, and they must have free commercial intercourse as between one nation and another.