

TALKING UP THE LABOUR PARTY

"Anything may be forgiven but lack of courage."—
R. L. Stevenson.

A subscriber on the Liberal side of politics, though not without Labour sympathies, remarked a month ago, at a chance meeting, that we were talking up the Labour Party as if they had said they would tax Land Values this year, whereas there was no word of anything of the kind. It was a partizan criticism but not out of place as subsequent events in the House of Commons have shown.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer expressed his sympathy with the proposals put before him last month by the Land Values Group, but in his reply to the Deputation he pointed to the threatened opposition of the landed interest. Truly a caustic comment on the Labour Party's contention that "there was no difference in principles between Liberal and Labour, except that Labour had more courage to push the principles to their logical conclusion." In the light of Mr. Snowden's attitude at this interview the contention is in need of some qualification.

It is admitted, as Mr. Pringle's question disclosed, that there is a majority in the House for this principle. Mr. Snowden still adheres to it in theory, but he had difficulty, he confessed, in making any promise of an instalment in his forthcoming Budget. Is it a case of giving "the law to the North and the nigger to the South?"

Ministers are working overtime, so we are told, at their various and numerous reconstruction schemes, handing over tens of millions of public money to the landowners for permission to build houses and take in the unemployed. "Some of that," the Prime Minister declared, in his policy speech in the Commons, 12th February, "will have to come back again into the national resources." There are lions in the way, says Mr. Snowden a month later to the Land Values Deputation in reply to their brilliant statement and exposition of the case for the very minimum of requirement necessary to get "something back for national resources this year."

Writing in the DAILY CHRONICLE, 5th January, Mr. Lloyd George, referring to his own experience in 1909, told how the axe was "blunted and notched by the interests inside and outside," and he continued:—

"Fourteen years after the great struggle which rocked the country from end to end, the great ground landlords are not yet making any contribution towards the costly improvements which build up their wealth." . . . Mr. Ramsay MacDonald has vested interests of a formidable character in his own camp, but of a different kind from those which I have indicated. They will ultimately, and perhaps soon, present obstacles just as refractory and stubborn as those which the privileges of a different class have opposed to progress. Sooner or later they will clog his footsteps and weigh him down and tire out his strength, but in so far as the interests which have hitherto blocked progress are concerned, he has a freer hand than the older parties. It is therefore his chance—let him take it manfully and without hesitancy or delay, and then alone will he make good. If he does, I earnestly believe that the Liberals in the House of Commons will see him through."

The "inside interests" in this case should not count for much axe blunting with 27 members of the Government openly pledged to "make good." And even if there be any so inclined they can better

shelter themselves behind the dominating interests outside. With Mr. Snowden's reply to the Land Values Group, Mr. Lloyd George may have by this time another view of the outside interest and how it can, without any help from the inside subdue a government with a fully equipped majority at its command. But that is an inside incident that can be heard about later on.

It is Mr. MacDonald's chance to put forward the Land Values policy, and in the name of a militant and advancing Labour Party he hesitates. He may complain that the alternative to dropping the Land Values policy is to sacrifice the opportunity he has to carry other measures. That argument must be judged on its merits but it leaves unsettled the question of how to bring the country out of industrial chaos. Production must be promoted and any measure that fails to achieve this purpose will count for nothing in the long run, for it is written: "Injustice tends to produce strife and division, while justice induces harmony and concord; and that injustice destroys all capacity for joint action both in States and in individuals and is, therefore, an element of weakness, not of strength."

The Labour Government hold to the principle of Land Values Taxation; but when do they expect the "present obstacles" to the policy to be less formidable than they are to-day? The time is ripe for some measure to be carried in harmony with social justice. The interests controlling the fundamental monopoly and the trusts and rings it begets are as determined as ever that their interests shall prevail and that their price must rule the market. Does Mr. MacDonald anticipate a time when these entrenched enemies of progress will be less inclined to smash his Government if and when he dares to touch the ark of the covenant?

Mr. Lloyd George believes that the Liberals in the House of Commons will see the Prime Minister through if he will take his courage in his hands and bring forward the Land Values policy. It is well said, but has Mr. Lloyd George yet done anything to convince the Government that the policy must be put through?

You cannot tax a community into opulence, a journalist of repute writes in his magazine that stands for the present day adjustments of society. Perhaps not; but what we can do is to alter our taxing system so that the community will come by its own. That is the purpose of the Taxation of Land Values, and the liberating economic effects of the policy, which are frankly enough advocated in Labour and Liberal official publications and advanced on their platforms, are equally allowed.

Courage is wanted to give effect to the reform in the coming Budget.

We can sympathize with Mr. Snowden in his difficult position, but we do earnestly appeal to him to make this Budget "the first available opportunity." And we call upon the Land Values majority in the House to be true to their convictions on this defined measure of economic justice, and with voice and vote to show the Government they are in earnest.

J. P.

Keep in mind the 30th Anniversary of "Land & Liberty" on 1st June. Celebrate the event by sending us a new subscriber.