

## LAND & LIBERTY

Published by THE UNITED COMMITTEE FOR THE  
TAXATION OF LAND VALUES.

Thirtieth Year. Established June, 1894.

3d. Monthly. By Post 4s. per annum.

United States and Canada, 1 Dollar.

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### UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE LAND QUESTION.

In the LABOUR SPEAKER'S HANDBOOK it is stated in prominent type that the Taxation of Land Values would check speculation in land and force valuable sites into use; that, the natural means of production becoming more accessible to labour, employment would be stimulated; that it would lead out to general development of the land and in this way the housing problem would be greatly simplified; that the immediate effect of a direct tax upon the value of land would be the opening up of land for productive purposes. Yet in the debates in the House last month on Unemployment not a word on land speculation was uttered by any member of the Government.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, as we reported last month, in his Budget speech said: "We regard it (the Taxation of Land Values) as important from the point of view of unemployment, housing and other reforms." If that be the case, why may we ask is it ignored when the matter is brought before Parliament in set terms, that is when Housing and Unemployment are up for special treatment? If Mr. Snowden is busy fitting up the Valuation Department with a view to a Budget tax on Land Values next year is it not imperative that public opinion should be informed by representative Labour speakers as to the merits and urgency of the reform? We search the papers in vain to find any Cabinet Minister dealing with the matter except Mr. Snowden himself and Mr. Wedgwood. Is it intended that the United Committee and its associated Leagues are to be left to make the pace on this Land Value policy? That view of the matter can be recognized and accepted to a degree, but surely the time has come for Labour leaders to speak out, especially when the Labour Party policy on unemployment is under examination and when public opinion is canvassed as to what are the Government's proposals.

The Prime Minister said at the beginning of his task that if the monopolies and rings interfered with his schemes he would break them. It looks in the face of the rising price of building materials as if they would break him, and they will unless and until he can lay the axe to the foot of the tree. In reply to a question put to the Secretary of the Ministry of Health, 22nd May, he stated that the amounts paid by the Exchequer to make up the annual loss on housing in the past four years totalled £16,628,447, and now we learn from the Minister of Health himself how he proposed to

increase the subsidy. Two million five hundred thousand houses are to be provided in fifteen years at a cost to the taxpayer of £1,389,000,000. The Exchequer will be responsible for £926,000,000 and the local taxing authorities for £463,000,000. It is a staggering proposition, and the best that can be said for it is that if the money goes for this enterprise it means so much less for armaments and such-like adventures. It is inconceivable that the taxpayer can foot the bill for both expenditures; therefore, at the end of the day if nothing happens there should at least be houses and not obsolete warships to compensate for the money spent.

But even assuming houses will be built (a big assumption in the circumstances), what a surrender to the monopolies, rings and trusts that hold the building trade in check! When the Prime Minister said he would break the rings and trusts, he tactfully omitted to say how, and now we know. The only difference between the Labour, Liberal and Tory Party housing schemes is that the Labour Party are prepared to feed the lions in the way with a good deal more public money. All three Parties are bent on solving the problem by way of dear land and high taxation. The Labour Party warns the organized rings and trusts rooted in land monopoly that if they obstruct due and proper measures will be taken to destroy them, and the Liberals, attributing the shortage to the absence of skilled labour, blame the Trade Unions concerned for this "one obstacle to building all the houses required." It is a sham fight on both sides.

Somehow it is assumed by the unthinking that the Trade Union obstacle is the last word in the argument, and we are solemnly assured "that there is no hope of making any progress in housing until this attitude of the building Trade Unions is changed." But it will not serve, if we are to get at the truth, to halt at this obstacle as if it were the end of all inquiry and the last word on the subject. The question remains—what is behind this attitude of the Trade Unions, and the answer is the fear of enforced idleness and low wages. Land monopoly has narrowed the opportunities, and the Trade Unions in self-defence have made industrial rings for themselves which they jealously guard at every vulnerable point. Let those who blame the Trade Unions for their class selfishness and limited vision, first undo the wrong that drives men that way. Let the greater and more injurious restrictions of our iniquitous land laws be removed, let us settle with this fundamental injustice and then see how Trade Unions will stand in relation to the development of industry and enterprise. If the organized workers are unreasonable in the attitude they adopt it is for their mentors and their masters to see that they have fair play to begin with, to see that no other small selfish class shall be privileged to keep Labour out of its natural inheritance.

The contention is that the vast sum of money to be taken from the earnings of industry to build houses will provide work for hundreds of thousands of men now walking the streets eking out a miserable existence on the "dole." It would, without a doubt, if the Chancellor of the Exchequer obtained the money by a tax on land values, for such a tax would fall on monopoly and not upon industry. So it seemed to the official Labour headquarters when they issued their election literature. But as things

are, the money will be taken from the pockets of the taxpayer, and not one penny from the monopolist who in speculative land prices bars the way to any reconstruction calculated to employ both labour and capital.

What the taxpayer spends on houses he cannot spend on clothing, furniture or food, and it follows that under Mr. Wheatley's State-subsidies housing principle the unemployed will be absorbed into the building trade only to be turned out into the streets at other points of the industrial field. The direction which the taxpayers' purchasing power may take under the Labour Government cannot work an economic miracle any more than the Minister of Labour can take rabbits out of his hat. It is new production that is wanted, a hundred voices proclaim, and the road to it is blocked by land monopoly. There is much talk of electrical development, afforestation, reclamation, roadmaking and such like reconstruction to provide work, but these schemes are in the air so long as the existing land system prevails. The more these schemes are promoted without regard to the need for land reform, the further they recede from the grasp of the unemployed.

One hour of economic justice, as set forth in the *LABOUR SPEAKER'S HANDBOOK* will do more for the improvement of the country than sixty years of house building at the expense of industry. New production, improved organization and greater efficiency on present lines of working will not bring a more equitable distribution of the produce and that is the failure of all industrial development. If that were not so, science, invention and the efficiency that has come with the subdivision of labour would have absorbed the unemployed from the very beginning of our marvellous industrial era and brought industrial peace and contentment.

The opportunities to employment are in the land and nowhere else, though some people talk as if this beneficence were at the disposal of a Government composed of men vested with a little brief authority but with no power to create a single job for one unemployed man. A journalist of repute, who writes columns and pages on the principle of how not to do it, sneered the other day at Henry George's "mystical" contention that land cannot rightly be held as private property. But put Henry George and what he taught out of the argument, and we are left with the reflection that nothing can be achieved except as we settle accounts with those who own and control the raw material of all industry. In other words every step in scientific management instead of a help becomes a hindrance to the emancipation of labour from the fetters of man-made law and practice.

In his searching and illuminating work *PROGRESS & POVERTY* Henry George predicted that the wage earner, the man who possessed nothing but his labour power, was being driven by the force of economic circumstances below the margin of subsistence, and here in this housing scheme of the Labour Minister of Health we have the prophecy fulfilled. The industrial system is rapidly going to pieces and with it the character and the independence of the worker. The question of how this happens in view of the part the labourer takes in the production of wealth is slurred over and the dignity of

labour ends in a scramble for a position of safety at any price. Yet labour, in the abstract, always, is the active factor in production and the wealth produced is but a circumstance to the potential wealth that science reveals, as Parliament talks about the condition of the labour market, and makes provision for the victims of their own ignorance and want of courage to go to the root of the matter.

Insurance is well enough in hard times, but what is required is better times, and the Taxation of Land Values will at least provide easier access to land and open up the way, in the words of Mr. Asquith himself, to industry and progress. The promotion of industry is the beginning of progress. It means new production, the employment of labour and a better distribution of its fruits. And if the Taxation of Land Values will further this object even half as much as its parliamentary supporters affect to believe, why hesitate to put forward the case on its merits?

In his promise to include a tax on land values in next year's Budget the Chancellor of the Exchequer has in mind the essential first step to the security of the worker. It is a reform he firmly declares that is related to housing and employment. This is something to be going on with, and it is the duty of every progressive member of Parliament to see that Mr. Snowden is not deprived of the opportunity to make good. As the Prime Minister says, there is no call for an early general election, nor is there any sign in the country, it is generally admitted, that an election would make any change in the relative positions of the three parties in the State. Both the Labour and Liberal Parties stand for Land Values Taxation, and there is a majority in the Commons openly pledged to see that the question is dealt with without undue delay.

J. P.

In regard to land reclamation and afforestation, the Government have found that private interests are as much their difficulty as was the case with previous Governments.—*WESTMINSTER GAZETTE Political Correspondent, 22nd May.*

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Commenting on the Access to Mountains Bill, the Duke of Atholl writes to *THE TIMES*, 17th May, that "in Scotland there is really no law of trespass; people can go where they choose." They can, until they meet the insolent keeper with his dogs.

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Owners of property required by Southend Corporation for road improvements claimed £18,070. The Corporation valuer's estimate was £8,707, and the official arbitrator has fixed the value at £10,140.—*WESTMINSTER GAZETTE, 24th May.*

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Owing to continued interruptions from the public gallery, yesterday's meeting of Westminster City Council was adjourned by the Mayor and the gallery ordered to be cleared. The matters under discussion were housing conditions in the City of Westminster and a proposal to widen Berkeley Street, W., by the acquisition of part of the Devonshire House site. The cost of the land and necessary paving and other work was stated to be £85,000, of which sum £28,334 would have to be borne by the Council. It was decided to proceed with the scheme.

"You are very good at spending ratepayers' money," shouted members of the public when the meeting was adjourned.—*DAILY NEWS, 23rd May.*