

## LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTION

The general election of members of the London County Council takes place on 4th March. It will be recalled that last year the Council approved a noteworthy report by its Finance Committee examining the whole problem of local taxation, approving the principle of the rating of site values, and recommending that representations be made to the Government asking them to introduce legislation enabling this reform to be carried out.

In reply to a question by Mr George Lathan, M.P., on 28th January, asking whether the communication from the London County Council urging the desirability of legislation being introduced at an early date to empower local authorities to levy a rate on site value had been considered, the Minister of Health (Sir Kingsley Wood) said that the Government did not contemplate introducing legislation.

It appears that the Labour Party on the London County Council do not intend the matter to lapse into oblivion. Their election manifesto says: "Labour will continue the policy of prudent and responsible financial control. London's government will endeavour to protect the general body of ratepayers by raising once again the question of rating land values and the 25 per cent rating of empty property, so that owners who benefit from the social work of the community should make proper contribution to its rates. Moreover we shall seek justice for London in the matter of Government grants generally and in regard to Waterloo Bridge particularly."

What further action will be taken depends upon whether the Labour Party retain their majority on the Council.

## THE GLASGOW ASSESSOR'S VIEW

Speaking at the annual meeting of the Glasgow Property Owners and Factors Association on 14th January, Mr J. Cassels Pinkerton, City Assessor of Glasgow, after dealing with some difficulties of extending principle of income tax to local rating, said:

"The rating of site values, as a method of distributing the burden of rates, had much to commend it. The site value reflected perhaps more than either of the two other systems (*i.e.* the present system and local income tax), the measure of the benefits conferred upon the owner of property by the activities of the community.

"It had to be borne in mind, however, that a change from the present system to that of the taxation of site values, would shift the incidence of rates. At present in Glasgow 52 per cent of the rates was borne by house property. If a system of taxation of site values were instituted the greater proportion of the rates would be paid by the business premises which occupied sites in the centre of the city."

With regard to the last sentence, it ought to be made clear that although the rating of site values would increase the share of local taxation borne by central sites, the burden would be imposed upon those who enjoyed the land value. The businesses carried on upon such sites would not as such be subject to any greater burden.

A new leaflet issued by the Liberal Council, 11 Great George Street, S.W.1 is entitled "The Right Way with the Rates." It shows what is wrong with the present system, and calls for the rating of land values. List is given of local authorities that have demanded this reform and the report of the London County Council on the subject is quoted with approval.

## INDEPENDENT PEASANTS BECOME LANDLESS LABOURERS

By A. Williams Price

The time for electing Councillors on the various local government bodies is approaching, and I venture to place before the electors a few facts, which it may be well for them to consider before voting:—

Denbighshire, its hills and vales covering 426,000 acres, was peopled by peasants and farmers in the year 1695, most of them held their land direct from the Crown, feeling sure that their holdings were secure so long as the rent, the tax, was paid. They were deceived. In that year (1695) the newly selected king, William III, bestowed all the Crown land in Denbighshire upon one of his favourites, together with vast mineral rights in other parts of North Wales.

This gift of, say 380,000 acres, to one of his supporters wounded the most tender and sacred feelings of the other supporters, with the result that the King was forced to revoke the grant; and the land was quietly filched in smaller lots, and at different times. The land was enclosed, the peasants, farmers, freeholders, became landless men, seeking wage labour.

A. N. Palmer (Ancient Land Tenures) states: "While it is undoubted that much common land has been wrongly converted to private use, the greater part of the land appropriated has been enclosed according to strict process of law."

If this be so, it does not seem to agree with the records and estimates of Gilbert Slater, M.A., for he states that while six million acres of land were enclosed by Acts of Parliament, eight million acres were enclosed without that "strict process of law," between the years 1700 and 1844.

Now let us consider what the "strict process of law" amounted to, how it was set in motion, and by whom.

A Member of Parliament would decide upon "enclosing" a tract of land, he would draft a "petition" stating that the land in question was not cultivated as it should be, if it were "enclosed," it would be rendered more productive, etc., etc.

Then he would select other M.P.s from among his friends, to form a committee; the committee would endorse the "petition" and it would be passed as a matter of course. The committee would then appoint a commissioner to carry out the job, and the land was "enclosed" and became private property.

Frequently the first intimation that the peasants, farmers, freeholders and users of the land received was the appearance of the commissioner, and as the penalty of death by hanging was incurred by any act of resistance to the will of the commissioner, there rarely was any resistance. Such was the "strict process of law."

But electors may think that this happened so long ago that it cannot be mended now?

Consider these facts then: In 1896 the Government cancelled one-half of the rates on land, in 1923 they cancelled another quarter of the rates, and in 1928, by the De-rating Act, they cancelled the remaining rates, amounting to £26,000,000, every year, say, £500,000 each week, and passed the burden on to the public.

Every person taking a penny bus ride, to get the "dole," say, should understand that a fraction of each and every penny goes to pay the rates on the pleasure grounds surrounding "the stately homes of England" (and of Wales) as well as providing a "dole" for agriculture.

(A letter appearing in the Wrexham ADVERTISER AND STAR, and other local papers of 18th December.)