

### "OUR POLICY."

"We would simply take for the community what belongs to the community—the value that attaches to land by the growth of the community; leave sacredly to the individual all that belongs to the individual."—Henry George.

### THE LORDS—THEIR DEFIANCE AND THEIR THREATS.

If we had lived in an "age of reason" politically, there would have been no House of Lords question to trouble us. Such an institution is not founded on reason. The people in their onward march were brought face to face with this stumbling block, and they naturally began to ask some questions about it.

Many unreasonable things were said for it, and probably a good many unreasonable things were said against it. It was supposed to be an assembly of men, who had inherited wisdom from the wise men or wiseacres of all the generations back to the time of William the Conqueror. Unfortunately for that claim, the family history of most of the members goes little farther back than that of the South African magnate, or the American millionaire.

How these people came to be in the House of Lords was best explained by the late Sir Wilfrid Lawson. Some were there because they had given services to their party, others because they had given money to their party, and some also because they had become a nuisance, and had to be got rid of somehow. An odd one was there because his great-great grandfather was a General, or an Admiral, and the principal qualification of a few was that they were drawing pensions granted to their ancestors.

If there was any difficulty in saying how they became members of the House of Lords, there was, at least, no difficulty in deciding what they were doing there. Their principal duty was to thwart the decrees of the people as a whole. They were there to do the will of the aristocracy. The people might vote and vote, but votes were not to be counted while they held the field. If the people voted—as unfortunately they sometimes did—a majority of representatives of the landed and privileged classes into the House of Commons, the Lords could afford to relax their vigilance. When, however, the people changed their mind, they were unable to change their masters. As soon as the Tory Party lost a grip of the House of Commons, they used the House of Lords for the purpose of governing the country as they wished it to be governed.

There were a number of constant and consistent politicians who objected to this kind of make-believe, but they were powerless to deal with the situation. Their academic reasons for democratic, as against aristocratic government, found favour at one time, and lost favour at another. To be fair, some of their protests had very little reason behind them. It was asserted that the House of Lords had thrown out good measures, although that charge could quite well

have been made as reasonably against the House of Commons. Some people protested that they liked the idea of a Second Chamber with the power of holding up and vetoing legislation, all they objected to was, that the House of Lords was a hereditary assembly. It is safe to say that an "age of reason" would hardly have tolerated such an argument. If two legislative assemblies were to be elected by the same vote, they were either to agree, or to differ. If they were to agree, there was no use for one of them, and if they were to differ, there was no use for the vote which put them there to quarrel.

The question of mending the House of Lords, difficult as it was, raised no more difficulties than the question of ending it. Fortunately, the people have been wisely led. The House of Lords has been left to reform itself, and while the institution has not been ended, it has been rendered powerless to do much evil. While the orthodox Radical was giving himself a sore head, wondering how the House of Lords could be got to agree to its own execution, "there was a small, but determined and relentless group" (to quote the FIELD) who thought they saw the way out of the difficulty. They had witnessed the "ploughing of the sands" by a Liberal Government, and they had become aware that the people would not be roused by "academic" reasoning. If the people were to be roused it would be—they thought—by the House of Lords throwing caution to the winds and "bothering" the consequences. This group believed that the Lords would stumble on the Land Values hurdle, and they did.

As soon as a bill came along to the Lords with the object of valuing land, they played havoc with it. The Lords knew that if land was valued, it would also be taxed, and they tried to prevent the one for fear of the other. It was about this time that the Home Secretary, Mr. Winston Churchill, said that they were ringing up the curtain on a play that was to have a long run. The curtain fell again at the conclusion of the first act, which was the throttling of valuation by the House of Lords. When it rose on the second act the scene was changed. Valuation was not then proposed in order to get taxes. It was the other way round; taxes were proposed in order to get valuation. Four land taxes—not land value taxes—were introduced into the Budget of 1909. Whatever objections "doctrinaires" may have found to such taxes, they were as fair as any other tax. It was possible that in their incidence they did not strike equally; no British tax up to the present does so. They had at least the merit of not taxing people in proportion to their industry, as some other taxes do. To some extent they invaded funds which were in the nature of a free gift to the recipients, and they also aimed at punishing and penalising the waste of land. One of them—the tax on ungoten minerals—was finally given up for a tax on mining royalties. Lloyd George got no thanks for the concession; he was criticised by his predecessor—Mr. Austen Chamberlain—and the argument was such as a disciple of Henry George might have used.

He was told that people would escape the tax if they did not work their minerals, but would have to pay as soon as they did work them. Mr. Chamberlain either does not know, or affects not to know, that most of the taxes that he has manipulated have had the effect he described. Most of the taxes he imposed as Chancellor of the Exchequer, freed the idlers from obligations, and charged industry and the processes of industry for the upkeep of government. Those taxes he would like to impose are even worse. They would tax the bread of the poor, to save the land of the rich. To use his father's words, he would tax "the food of the people to raise the rent of the landlord," for he has the "family failing" of being a food taxer, and "what he has said" may be "used against him."

If no other justification could be given for the land taxes, they justified themselves by introducing the valuation of land in a way that the House of Lords was powerless to stop. It is true they showed defiance; they were not content with defence and they made an attack on legislation with which they had nothing to do. They roused the people who were so difficult to move when their friends tried to rouse them, and the curtain fell on the second act of the drama.

When the curtain rose again it was evident that we were witnessing the third and last act of that edition of the play. The Lords were once more on their defence. They were asked to promise not to lay violent hands on another Budget, and they were told that they must not block the passages when other bills were going through. Like the mate who was offered assistance by the cabin-boy, they were too astonished even to swear. Finally they did gasp out some protests, but the great bulk of them soon realised that the game was up. They have promised not to touch future Budgets, and they have agreed to a limited veto. This has been done under protest, and they threaten that as soon as the people give them power they will resume the old game. They forget that the people never gave them power, and if they should ever mistake any mandate given by the people, their latter end will be worse than their first.

In the drama they are likely to witness next, the prices of the boxes and stalls will be raised. If they occupy privileged places, they will be asked to pay. From their standpoint, this is sad. They wanted to stage a farce—the farce of Tariff Reform—in which they would have had their seats free, and the people in the gallery and the pit would have paid for the lot.

This farce has been played here, and it has been played abroad. It has been a failure everywhere, and had to be superseded in New Zealand and Australia by the Taxation of Land Values. New Zealand, capable of holding an audience of twenty millions, could not persuade six hundred thousand to stay and witness the farce. The people crowded one another to get out of the place until they put on the new and better piece, which will soon be staged here.

The Taxation of Land Values has been a success where

Protection has been a failure. It has attracted audiences which—to say the least of it—have considered the Protection or Tariff Reform farce as played out.

We have not only selected a different play, but we have chosen different actor managers. In addition to the food-taxing heir of a food-taxing manager, we had a whole family of heirs of another stage manager, who had ideas of reforming land tenure in such a way as to strengthen the grip of the landlords. Their father taught them, and tried to teach us, that tied land was better than free land. His idea was to create a number of "small holders" who would beg or borrow money in order to starve on a small croft, sold to them at an exorbitant price. If they were unable to clear their feet, the food taxers would tell them it was on account of cheap foreign food, and they would be apt to forget the dear land for which they had agreed to pay so much. Having agreed to pay in the belief that they could earn the money by working on the holding, they could easily be roused to defend the interests of landholders, who had the profitable, and not the impoverished end of the landholding deal. This former Premier—Lord Salisbury—said "peasant proprietorship was the strongest bulwark against revolutionary change." Any change must be disagreeable to his family and relations. They took on trust the government of the country in the name of the Tory Party for about twenty years. Their names are on view in the Pensions List, and their control was complete. Sometimes it was carried out by a willing majority in the House of Commons, at other times by a majority in the House of Lords.

One of these heirs now talks of "revolution," which shows that the King and Constitution has less to fear from democracy than from the aspirations of unbridled aristocrats and their loyal (*sic*) friends.

Much of the supposed loyalty that goes begging for honours at a Coronation period, evaporates on the slightest provocation. Those who pretend to guard the honour of the King are the first to make his position difficult. There are those who give less lip-service who have a greater sense of propriety. Accepting the King as the representative of Free Institutions they put no difficulties in his way. They do not seek to make him a party to a quarrel in which he is only indirectly concerned. The threat of the Lords to repeal the Parliament Bill is simply a threat to raise the same difficulty again. Like most threats, it consists of wild talk for which the authors will some day be unwilling to take the responsibility. We heard of the threatened repeal of the Death Duties; we have seen a Tory candidate warn the Land Union off his pitch, with their proposal to repeal land valuation. Some inquisitive electors will no doubt ask the Tory candidates, at the first opportunity, if they intend to hand back the Government of the country to the House of Lords. The answer will be interesting, but it will not be in the affirmative.

W. R.

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