

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DISCUSSION.

THE LIBERAL PARTY AND THE TAXATION OF LAND VALUES.

BY HAROLD RYLETT (IN THE "NATION" OF OCTOBER 12th.)

From what has appeared in the Liberal Press and the LABOUR LEADER lately, one would imagine that the Taxation of Land Values was something new to Liberalism, whereas it has been the avowed official policy of the party for four-and-twenty years.

Let me tell the story. Henry George came to this side in October, 1881, and in August of the following year, while on a visit to Ireland, was twice arrested through police blundering. The incident had this redeeming feature that it advertised PROGRESS AND POVERTY as, perhaps, nothing else could have done. Then the TIMES gave the book a fine column review, said, by the ATHENÆUM, to have been written by Fraser Rae. This review, as George himself said, was "written with great skill, for the purpose of calling attention to the book." The purpose was so successfully attained that the stock in the publisher's hands was exhausted by the afternoon of the day on which the review appeared. For several years, subsequently, Henry George was the central figure of a series of vigorous crusades in Great Britain and Ireland, and to a few of us who saw him off at Liverpool at the conclusion of his last tour in this country, he said: "Be of good cheer. The single tax will enter practical politics on your side in the form of Taxation of Land Values."

Already the phrase was in use. The Report of the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes appeared in the spring of 1885. Sir Charles Dilke was chairman of the Commission, and his late Majesty King Edward VII., Cardinal Manning, and other prominent men were members of it. The Report suggested that land in the vicinity of towns should be rated at, say, 4 per cent. on its selling value, and recommended that "these matters should be included in legislation when the law of rating comes to be dealt with by Parliament."

In 1888, at the Birmingham meeting of the National Liberal Federation, one of the official resolutions included these words: "That it is necessary, at the earliest possible moment, to deal with the question of ground rents and values and of mining royalties." At the Manchester meeting of the Federation in the following year, one of the official resolutions began thus: "That this Council declares that in any reform of the land laws, a just and equitable taxation of land values and ground rents is an essential condition." At the general meeting in Manchester, Mr. Gladstone, the Rt. Hon. Henry Campell-Bannerman, Sir William Harcourt, Mr. (now Lord) Morley, and other leading Liberals were present. Sir James Kitson presided at the evening demonstration in the Free Trade Hall, and, in introducing Mr. Gladstone, observed:—

"They also believed, by the resolutions the Conference had passed, that the food of the people of this country should be freed from taxation, believing, as they did, that there was wealth enough in this land, if the right people were rated—if ground rents were taxed—if the landlords paid an equitable tax, to entirely free the food of the people from taxation."

I was present at these Manchester meetings, and remember well the unanimity and enthusiasm with which the Taxation of Land Values was adopted.

From that day to this the Taxation of Land Values has been an integral part of Liberal policy, and has been advocated by Mr. Gladstone, Sir Henry Campell-Bannerman, Mr. Asquith, and, indeed, by all leading Liberals.

For men calling themselves Liberals to object now to the advocacy of the proposal, or to say, as the LABOUR LEADER does, that this is a doctrine "which the leaders of Liberalism

would be the first to repudiate," and that "the electors are being told, dishonestly and untruthfully, that these ideas form part of Liberalism," is to me very strange. The Taxation of Land Values may be as wicked as one or two men calling themselves Liberals declare it to be. If it is, I, who have been working hard for it for the past thirty years, should be glad to be shown my error, in order that I may do something in the way of penance. Again, if it is as ineffective, for the purpose its advocates have in view, as the LABOUR LEADER would have us believe, I should be grateful to be shown a more excellent way. But, just or unjust, wise or foolish, it is, and has been for four-and-twenty years, the official policy of the Liberal Party, always provided, of course, that official resolutions and public utterances of responsible leaders mean anything.

Accordingly, I ask to be allowed to protest, with all possible emphasis, against what I must describe as the treachery to Liberalism which the repudiation of the Taxation of Land Values signifies.

LORD LANSDOWNE AND MR. BONAR LAW ON UNIONIST LAND POLICY.

At a mass meeting of the National Unionist Association held at the Albert Hall, London, on November 14th, Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Bonar Law were the principal speakers.

In the course of his speech, Lord Lansdowne said (according to the TIMES):—

We stand for the restoration of the British Constitution. We stand for the maintenance of the Union, coupled with the continuation of a generous policy to Ireland so long as she remains part and parcel of us. We stand for the efficiency of our national defence. We stand for a land policy not based upon class hatred and backstairs inquiries but upon a frankly avowed desire to improve the cultivation of the land and to better the lot of those who cultivate it, notably by increasing the number of those interested in it as owners of the soil. And, lastly, we stand for Tariff Reform, necessary for the prosperity of our own trade and for the consolidation of the Empire.

Tariff Referendum Discarded.

During his remarks on Tariff Reform Lord Lansdowne said that if they were successful at the next General Election they would not be bound by the pledge of Mr. Balfour, given at the last General Election, to submit Tariff Reform proposals to a referendum, but they were ready to give a twofold undertaking. "In the first place," he said, "we are ready to undertake that we will specify precisely and exactly the amount, the limits within which we propose to resort to taxation of this kind, and we will undertake that we will not exceed those limits without further authorisation from the people of this country. That is one undertaking, and the other is this: We will undertake that any revenue raised from taxes of this kind shall not be treated as ordinary revenue, but shall be used for the purpose of alleviating other burdens falling upon the shoulders of the working classes."

The Land Inquiry.

Mr. Bonar Law said:—

Lord Lansdowne has spoken to you on Tariff Reform. I concur in every word which has fallen from Lord Lansdowne. Tariff Reform has been described, and truly, for years as our first constructive plank.

It (Mr. Lloyd George's Land Inquiry Committee) is not the inquiry of a Government. They have not even the courage to be responsible for it, though it is they who are the sole cause of it. It is, as Lord Lansdowne has told