

Mr. Fryer seconded. He had, he said, had the opportunity of discussing the question with a friend from Sydney, and the latter was convinced the system was quite fair and a valuable form of rating.

Alderman Sir W. Bowater thought members of the Council who wanted to know what the system was had much better apply to the Sydney Rating Association rather than trouble an already overworked committee.

Alderman Clayton remarked that the practice in the Council on such a matter had been to give notice of motion.

Mr. George Cadbury, jun., thought the Council wanted information on the subject, and that the system should be investigated. They wanted to know what would be the bearing of such a system if adopted in Birmingham.

The amendment was lost.

THE LIBERAL PARTY AND LAND VALUES TAXATION

Westville, Darlington.

To the Editor of LAND & LIBERTY.

Dear Sir,—As a strong supporter of many years' standing of the Taxation of Land Values, I am very sorry to note that the Movement is not being supported in your journal on strictly non-political lines, and I feel sure that our efforts will suffer thereby. In the notes in your August issue you were very unfair to Sir Donald Maclean and his followers, whilst the report in your news columns of the proceedings in the House of Commons showed how disappointing the attitude of the Labour Party had been on this question, but which received no rebuke at your hands. One member of the Labour Party blessed the Land Acquisition Bill, a better description of which would have been a Landlords' Endowment Bill.

In your September number a very extraordinary error occurs in the editorial notes on the front page. The writer, discussing the Land Acquisition Bill, and after referring to one of the Lords' amendments which made it still less likely than before that land would be fairly valued under the Bill, says—

"The Commons agreed to the alteration and accepted the position that the valuers need not consult the returns for taxation unless they choose. . . . Some Liberal papers have protested against this surrender of the Commons after the prolonged fight which Sir Donald Maclean put up against what he called blood prices for land."

The writer then continues with the following unaccountable words:—

"This brave commendation of Sir Donald is misplaced, for he himself accepted the open market and the willing seller, and said so. He showed no sympathy for the proposal to take rateable value as a basis, or as the basis, and so challenge any other assessment or valuation. There he befriended the speculative landowner, and there he fell. He has no cause of complaint against the House of Lords."

This paragraph does two things which are not done by decent and responsible people. (1) It makes an untrue specific statement about Sir Donald Maclean which could not have been made by any informed person, and (2) it deliberately implies that Sir Donald Maclean and the Independent Liberals in the House of Commons did not put up an honest fight against the Land Acquisition Bill, whereas it is common knowledge that they did, and that they were the only group in the House who did so.

Take the first point. On the second reading of the Bill a reasoned amendment of rejection was moved. Nineteen persons voted for the amendment, of whom Sir Donald was one. In speaking to this amendment

Sir Donald Maclean used the expression mentioned by the writer in LAND & LIBERTY, "the open market and the willing seller." This is the connection in which he used it:—

"I say that in the taking of land for this necessary public purpose there should be no unfair profits derived by those who hold the land, and I say that Clause 2 as it now stands gives them unfair profits. . . . The basis of the Excess Profits Tax is that the great profits have been caused by the War, and the Government therefore say, 'Give us 80 per cent., and you can have 20 per cent.' In this vital matter (i.e., in land acquisition) the whole thing is left to the open market and the willing seller."—HANSARD, April 10th.

If he had stopped there his meaning would have been obvious to any office-boy. But five lines farther on he adds:—

"Who is going to come into the market? Why, every public authority in the land is going to come into the market. What effect will that have upon the price of land? There is nothing here to stop it; there are no safeguards at all. . . . I say that we are fully justified in voting for the reasoned amendment upon the Paper."—HANSARD, April 10th.

A more plain and definite rejection of the system of the "open market and the willing seller" in this connection could not be imagined. Yet the writer in LAND & LIBERTY goes out of his way to affirm that Sir Donald Maclean "accepted" it.

The general charge brought against the Independent Liberals is so groundless as to be really foolish. It will be sufficiently met by two references to the facts.

On the Report stage of the Bill Sir Donald Maclean moved an amendment with the object of making the Commissioners of Inland Revenue the ultimate authority for valuation. May I say that this amendment, so far as it went, was in the interests of the principles for which LAND & LIBERTY stands? Would the writer of this offensive note admit that? He would be well advised to do so. For not only did Colonel Wedgwood and Mr. Raffan vote for the amendment, but Mr. Raffan, in speaking to it, said:—

"After all, this is the crucial decision with regard to this Bill. If this amendment is passed, I believe there will be a certain amount of confidence on the part of the local authorities, who at present have made such a very strong protest, that an opportunity will be given under this Bill of securing land for housing on something like reasonable terms."—HANSARD, June 25th.

Again, on the third reading Sir Donald Maclean moved the rejection of the Bill in these terms:—

"This House declines to give a third reading to a Bill which sets up an unnecessary and expensive staff of valuers, and fails to establish the principle that the value on which land is taxed should also be the value at which it may be acquired for public purposes."—HANSARD, July 11th.

The writer in LAND & LIBERTY says that Sir Donald Maclean "showed no sympathy for the proposal to take rateable value as the basis." When may one be said to show sympathy with a proposal? Is it enough to actually make the proposal, and to go to a division on it in the House of Commons?

It is very difficult to understand the motive for this and other attacks that have been made by LAND & LIBERTY on the Liberal Party. Supporters of the taxation of land values are to be found in all parties, but they have always been and they are to-day far more numerous in the Liberal Party than in any other. It is always a doubtful practice to attack your friends, but to attack them with feeble and ill-tempered inaccuracies is not a task for responsible men, and I hope in the interest of so important a reform that our supporters will not use it for the benefit of any political party.

Yours truly,

CHAS. W. STARMER.