

An English View of the Second Snowden Budget

EVEN after two weeks it seems to be impossible to set down the position produced by the Chancellor's budget speech and proposals; but this much is certain: as the first shot at Concord was said to ring 'round the world, so the face of British public life has been changed to something greater, far more deadly, or more beneficent, as we may take it.

Last year I tried to convey to readers of *LAND AND FREEDOM* that a bare third of the Cabinet and of the House of Commons were in favor of any sort of Georgeist action, however elementary: many were hostile, either as Marxists or realtors, and a third were the masses of the Land Nationalization Federation, operating on our flanks, with half their loaded artillery aimed at us, half at the landlords. It is only a few years since Mr. Snowden as their president backed a bill in Parliament to buy out all the British landlords for anything up to sixty thousand million pounds sterling—say, one supposes, three hundred billion dollars—for which would be obtained the improvements on leased farms and the reversion of urban ground rents.

Only a few years before that and he had said (July 4, 1910):

"If we as Socialists had complete control. * * * We should endeavor to secure revenue not by increment upon land or by taxing land values, but * * * I would give the present land owners every penny of the present value of their land. The state would then resume the ownership, and you would have settled for all time the question of future increment."

This was the basis of the 1923 purchase bill giving fifty years' purchase of a rental value never yet ascertained or agreed, which was the L. N. F. policy, and by means of a most defective system of what in America is called the primary nomination has a full third of the Lower House (probably two-thirds) in its favor—save only that it is utterly impossible to carry out.

One pregnant sentence in the budget speech does show Saul the Persecutor become Paul the Apostle—not suddenly; for, as I said last year, "he is far from us still, but his face is toward us and his pace is rapid."

"By this measure we assert the right of a community to the ownership of land. If private individuals continue to possess a nominal claim to the land, they must pay a rent to the community for the enjoyment of it, and they cannot be permitted to enjoy that privilege to the detriment of the welfare of the community." (*Hansard*, 4th May, 1931, column 48.)

With many other such wise and noble words in a speech of one hour he laid the whole House of Commons prostrate at his feet, and called in as strong allies the great part of the Conservative press. After one speech it was assured that the House of Lords would not resist his proposals: it is seen that in the last two weeks the only real criticism from the Conservative opposition has been that the dullness of Georgeism in the proposals is inadequate.

For instance, Neville Chamberlain (in whose favor Stanley Baldwin deposed Winston Churchill as the Opposition official expert on finance) proposed to amend the budget proposals to ensure that improvements made by the holder of his predecessor in title within the last fifty years should be clearly exempt from site value tax. This, if honestly meant, is hard for a Single Taxer to oppose.

Again, Stanley Baldwin said that a tax so small as one penny in the pound would not pay for the cost of valuation. If this is true, as it may be, the remedy is to collect more pence on the same valuation.

It would appear absurd that opposition to taxation of land value should collapse at a touch, but many Conservatives are weary of heavy taxes on their improvements for the benefit of monopolistic colleagues. But all this is result of the budget; and before it came in, the proposals had to be what the L. N. F. might support and force to an end against the Lords. And on the budget morning not one of the papers gave a lead of hope and light to the Chancellor they acclaimed next day as master. So the L. N. F. had to be conciliated, by their own president. The agricultural value of all land used for agriculture (perhaps £30 per acre average) is to be exempt from taxation, and even from valuation. Mineral value of all mineral land is also to be thus exempt. Tax of less than 10 shillings (on £120 of taxable site value) is not to be collected.

This is what Georgeists have to swallow with a sick heart, to get a valuation and a tax of a penny, though every speech in the Commons, in favor or hostile, was applicable to a tax of at least a sixpence, which would have gone through had the return of fivepence been pledged to remission of taxes on various classes. But the L. N. F. desire to buy and work all the farms in the country under civil service clerks. The miners' members want to buy and work all the mines in the country under civil service clerks; the Marxists are with both if the price is low enough and control is adequately forcible.

We have not control of the budget, which owes its marvellous success to the bits of our philosophy which it embodies, and no one knows this better than the Chancellor; but he is the colleague of a Cabinet which has preserved a guarded silence, and the servant of a House of Commons which does not yet represent the national feeling in this regard. Hence grave dangers exist, of which two have lately shown as threats. One of our strongest opponents is Dr. Addison, the Minister for Agriculture, and once a spectacular failure as Liberal Minister for Housing. A bill of his to establish vast state farms of Russian type with no limit to funds involved was badly handled by the House of Lords.

The popularity of the budget has already been invoked to reinstate this measure, which is eminently calculated to bring trouble to those who promote and who would work it. Again, a "new principle of law" was approved by the House of Lords on May 8, 1931, by which street improvements (sewers, etc.) were chargeable to the front-

agers. In this way the owners of central and developed areas would get off in receipt of real advantages paid for by the holders on outskirts only. This grudging concession from the old law by which owners in any case paid nothing is an endowment of central magnates and so plausible that it needs stern supervision.

But Snowden has the country at his feet, and he knows, and his colleagues know (for they have all kept the issue in the background so far), that it is the Georgeism in the budget which has done it, and the exceptions give Parliamentary and not public support.

In the absence of the finance bill we have no close details of the Cabinet plans—it is fairly safe to say that any modification of its provisions since the budget speech will be our way unless the Cabinet would rather fall than respond to the public will.

It seems we will have by 1932-33 a valuation of all land except agricultural land used for agriculture, and mineral land and possibly units of less than £120 in land value. On this a tax of one penny in the pound will be levied, with no graduation or further exemption, as an assertion of public right to the land; and the hope is expressed that municipal taxation will be collected on the same valuation in due course. These "local rates" are almost the heaviest in the world, and a special burden on British trade which Mr. Winston Churchill's diversion of a part to a tax on motor spirit has done nothing to alleviate.

Properties are to be valued as "units" at per separate holding, rightly or wrongly. There is no open opposition at all—it is now, as on November 12, 1918, when one has to fear allies far more than the enemy from whom a nightmare of misdirection is lifted!

The bold, bare, enormous wrong of land monopoly continues, and the corrupting force of its able defenders is as strong as ever. What line the enemies of Georgeism may take will soon be revealed. Meantime the organizers of the International Union and the fighters of the Parliamentary Group are in a position to exploit far greater advances from the new front, and it may be to correct some of the faulty dispositions of indispensable associates.

MERVYN J. STEWART.

THE lad from Cowley, Yorkshire, who came from a sick-bed to expound the nation's bank account shows the indomitable spirit that is characteristic of the nation itself.—*British American*, Chicago, Ill.

ALL England is in an uproar. In other words England, and some of our own folks, are all excited about something that has been in effect here for years. Clearly this revolutionary tax which has stirred all England is old stuff to Americans.—Camden, (N. J.) *Post*.

THE Chancellor's proposal is merely an entering wedge for higher taxation after the principle is established.

—*Detroit (Mich.) News*.

Honor Alfred Bishop Mason

ON Wednesday evening, May 6, the Manhattan Single Tax Club tendered a dinner at the Vaudeville Club, West 46th Street, New York City, to Alfred Bishop Mason, one-time president of the club and now a resident of Florence, Italy. About fifty assembled to greet the visitor after his ten years' absence from the city; and it was singularly enjoyable to hear from a number of friends who recalled the old days.

It was difficult to believe that the handsome and dignified gentleman who spoke so charmingly for nearly an hour was upwards of eighty years of age. Certainly he does not look it.

He told us of the Italy of today, of which after ten years' residence there, he has so intimate a knowledge. He referred to the reforms instituted by Mussolini and told what the dictator had done for the country in exterminating the camorra and establishing schools and hospitals, in providing amusement parks and other social advantages for children and adults.

It was recalled by a number of the speakers that four years before "Progress and Poverty" appeared this man had written a political economy which ran through many editions. He had not at first made the discovery that land values should supply the needs of revenue, but in later editions announced his belief in the Single Tax.

Mr. Mason has written many books, his latest, in which he appears as editor, being entitled "Walpole's England," a judicious selection from the correspondence of the greatest letter writer in English literature.

James R. Brown presided and the speakers who responded to calls were Charles H. Ingersoll, Frederick C. Leubuscher, Dr. M. M. Miller, Lawson Purdy, Oscar Geiger, Charles T. Root, Walter Fairchild, Dr. Andrews and Joseph Dana Miller.

A letter from Poultney Bigelow was read in part as follows:

"It is now just half a century since I first read 'Progress and Poverty.' The effect of that book was electrical, and its author became to me the latest addition to the glorious chain of thinkers—of reformers—of martyrs in the cause of truth. * * * His fame grows from day to day while those who defamed him are now forgotten. Would that I could be with you among those who are doing honor to Alfred Bishop Mason, but my wife's health precludes even sharing so great an honor as the one extended to faith fully yours, POULTNEY BIGELOW."

The meeting was prolonged after the dinner by those who desired to shake the hand of our distinguished visitor and bid him Godspeed on his journey home.

WHATEVER the outcome, the status of great landed estates and privileges is apparently in course of great change. The lords will fight hard but the battle promises to be in vain.—*Dayton, (Ohio) Herald*.