

The Whitley Scheme.

The Whitley proposals, however admirable they may be in themselves, are simply a method of facilitating negotiations between employers and employed on all matters affecting their trade. They are simply a piece of machinery which may be used to great advantage if other circumstances are favourable. They do nothing to alter the conditions of the labour market. If the supply of labour is relatively scarce, the workers will have the means ready at their hand to commence negotiations for an increase of wages. If not, of what avail will the Whitley Committee be?

The fundamental problem for the workers is to make the supply of labour relatively scarce, or conversely to increase the opportunities of production and the demand for labour. This cannot be done except by opening up to use the land, which is the only original source of wealth. Any other device is but a transitory palliative and no permanent solution. Yet Mr. Barnes appears to have ignored this most fundamental question with whose principles he must admit a certain amount of familiarity, as he has paid them some deference in the past. Has he changed his mind, or does membership of the War Cabinet involve suppression of honest conviction?

Derelict Land Broken Up.

Referring to statements in the Press as to the amount of "unsuitable" land that has been broken up at the instance of the County Agricultural Committees for the purpose of growing food, the Food Production Department states that:

as a rule these statements, although they may not be altogether without foundation, will not bear the light of careful and impartial enquiry. Recently in Nottinghamshire (where prizes for the best crops grown on newly-broken grassland were given) some thousand acres of crops on the new plough were inspected. The judges, who were practical agriculturists, failed to find any "unsuitable" land that had been broken up. On the other hand, they found about 480 acres of wheat which was much better than might have been expected for a first crop, and averaged about four quarters to the acre. On a similar acreage of oats the average was about six quarters to the acre. The only land the crop on which might have given a little colour to the theory of unsuitability was carrying potatoes. This was the least successful crop inspected; and it is noteworthy that the judges attributed the comparative poorness of the crop to want of expert knowledge in potato growing on the part of the growers—not to unsuitable land.

Our readers may care to bear this in mind as an impartial confirmation of the fact often stated in these columns that much good agricultural land has been held out of use by the owners. We have here a positive statement that "thousands of acres" of good land in one county alone had been let down to grass.

The extraordinarily high prices now being paid for agricultural holdings are further exemplified, says the *Westminster Gazette*, by the bidding at a farm sale on August 31 at Cheadle, Cheshire. The farm of 41 acres, rented at £100 per year, was sold, after keen competition, for £4,800, by far the highest price ever paid in this part of Cheshire.

THE LIBERAL LAND POLICY

Declaration of Liberal Policy after the war, in the form of resolutions prepared by the Executive Committee of the National Liberal Federation for the consideration of the Federation at Manchester on September 26 and 27, 1918:

THE LAND.

This Committee confidently asserts that the interest of the people in the land is paramount; that the Land Laws should be drastically revised in the interests of the nation as a whole; that the principle of the Taxation of Land Values should be more fully adopted; that the Land Valuation under the Finance Act of 1909-10 should be brought up to date and made public; that the State and local authorities should be given full powers to obtain, by a cheap and speedy process, whatever land is needed for any public purpose, present or prospective, at a price based on the valuation; that the movement for small holdings and allotments should be vigorously pressed forward; that allotment land should not be taken away unless it is shown at a public inquiry that such land is needed for some greater public utility, and that, in such a case, substitute land should be provided; that part of the burden of rates should be transferred from buildings and improvements to land values; that the tenants of houses and shops should be entitled to full compensation for improvements and disturbance, and that there should be relief from onerous covenants.

AGRICULTURE.

This Committee declares that to maintain and develop the prosperity of agriculture is a prime object of national policy, and that every practicable measure should be adopted which, without injury to other interests, will promote agricultural production and increase the proportion of our population engaged upon the land.

AND A CRITICISM.

The following letter appeared in the *Daily News* of September 11:

SIR,—The proposals of the National Liberal Federation on Land Value Taxation, such as they are, lie buried in an omnibus resolution among the pious aspirations which fall in the annual "massacre of the innocents." They are worded thus: "The principle of the Taxation of Land Values should be more fully adopted; that the Land Valuation should be brought up to date and made public; . . . that part of the burden of rates should be transferred from buildings and improvements to Land Value."

In the third of these suggestions (they are hardly more) I see the hand of Mr. Runciman. It is at least accurately worded. With it one might be content, except that a Liberalism which takes devolution under its wing should realise that local authorities have a right to decide for themselves how much of the rates they will transfer to land value.

Land taxers will cavil most at the two first suggestions. The principle of Land Value Taxation has not so far been adopted at all. The first thing land taxers would do would be to sweep away altogether the so-called land taxes imposed in 1909-10, make the landlords supply their own valuation, and tax them on that valuation. This would break the land monopoly and make land cheap, which seems good Liberalism.

One had hoped that the infusion of Mr. Pringle into the Liberal Party councils would have helped matters forward. There is no sign, however, of "the fundamentals" in these resolutions. Even taxation of capital on capital value has been evaded. I am afraid that my old friends Mr. McKenna and Mr. Tennant still rule the caucus, and still rule out, as they did in 1909, any real attack on landlordism. Those who are left of genuine Liberals will have to look elsewhere. There is little room for them in the "Liberal Party" of these resolutions.

JOSIAH C. WEDGWOOD.

House of Commons, S.W. 1, September 3.