

A SUBTLE ATTACK ON LIBERTY

By Arthur H. Weller, J.P.

IN AN article printed in the *Manchester Guardian*, Sir Ronald Davison said there is a growing number of men who have settled down for life on an unconditional dole and have lost all interest in trying to earn wages. This indictment, he declared, does not apply to the great majority of the unemployed, but to a venal minority who have succumbed to the temptations of the too mechanical system of allowances. He estimated that there are about 200,000 of such men in our cities who are thus being demoralized, and that half of that number are under 35 years of age. There is an unanswerable case, said Sir Ronald, for an immediate policy of stiffening our dole administration.

That prolonged unemployment demoralizes men is indisputable. It is not surprising therefore if some men under its influence give up the struggle and lose all desire to become self-supporting. Such men, it is complained, refuse "suitable jobs" and even reject offers of training. It is proposed to deal with the situation by employing compulsory measures and thus robbing these men of what little independence they still possess. The *Manchester Guardian* says: "A touch of compulsion must lie behind the most sympathetic administration," but Sir George Gillett, Commissioner for the Special Areas, is more explicit. He asks whether it is not possible to bring together the huge reservoir of idle labour and the need for national defence: to find openings for the unemployed in air raid precautions and other measures. Thus the unemployed are used as an argument or excuse for industrial or military conscription—the one leading to the other. The dependent position of these men makes this attack on British liberty safe—they are getting something for nothing and therefore a "touch of compulsion" can be applied to them which it would not be wise to apply to self-supporting citizens. It is obvious that unemployment does not only demoralize its victims; it also demoralizes those who are willing to take advantage of the misfortunes and helplessness of others.

The purpose of the proposed training is to fit the unemployed for skilled employment. This might benefit individuals, but it would not reduce unemployment. Unemployment is not due to lack of skill, but to a lack of jobs. In the pathetic army of the unemployed there are skilled and unskilled men. Training the unskilled would enable some of them to compete against men now working and thus tend to reduce the wages of skilled labour; it would redistribute unemployment, but would neither increase the demand for labour nor reduce the cost of unemployment allowances.

The treatment of men demoralized by poverty and idleness is one problem; unemployment is another problem. To penalize the former or exploit the latter would be as senseless as it would be cruel. The behaviour of men who refuse jobs and training is not always stupid or lazy. Sir Ronald Davison wrote in his article: "The low wages they might earn (if employed) have a good deal . . . to do with it." Some men with large families receive more in allowances than they can hope to get by working. Evidently the taking of "suitable jobs" would mean a lower standard of comfort for these men and their families. In this situation the question is: Should the allowances be reduced or the administration otherwise stiffened, or should the injustice of low wages be attacked? To this question there can be only one answer from men of goodwill: Wages must be raised until they represent the full value of the work or service which they are paid. When such wages are available, no man will choose a bare existence on a beggarly allowance.

"The long-term remedy," says Sir Ronald, "is to see that our young workers have better parents and a better start in the industrial world." Whatever that may mean, it is not the remedy. The real remedy is to remove the cause of unemployment and low wages, and thus enable all men to earn and to enjoy their earnings. A better start in the industrial world as at present constituted would not eliminate the cut-throat competition for jobs which drives wages down to the bare subsistence level . . . In this country there are about two million more men than jobs, and there are natural opportunities for the useful employment of a much larger number in the unused land in town, country, and mining districts. But before men can work and production can begin, a landowner's terms must be accepted. In many cases these terms are prohibitive, and land lies unused while men vainly seek for work and suffer through lack of the good things which the land can be made to yield—food, homes, minerals, and manufactured goods. This is the fundamental cause of the problem of poverty, and the present taxation system is only necessary because the economic rent of land (land values) is privately appropriated. Land monopoly can be ended by the public appropriation of land values—the taxation of land values and the progressive untaxing of industry. In the happy conditions resulting, men would need no other incentive to work than their desire for the good things of life and the assurance that the full fruits of their toil and skill would be theirs.

Attacks on liberty cannot be successfully resisted by mere defence. The answer to those who argue that "in the circumstances" restrictive measures are necessary, is that the circumstances are wrong and must be radically changed. Civilization is based on a fundamental injustice, land monopoly, and the fruits of this wicked institution are seen in poverty, discontent, oppression and war. Full economic freedom must be claimed and worked for, and the first step towards this ideal must be the destruction of monopoly and privilege. The greatest and most injurious of these is land monopoly, and the taxation of land values is a simple, just, and practical method by which the people's rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness can be won. Until this task is undertaken, the workers (employed and unemployed) will wage a losing fight against the forces of reaction and dictatorship.—Reprinted from the *Oldham Evening Chronicle*.

Who Owns the Earth? is a new pamphlet by Miss Margaret E. Bateman, of Montreal, published (price 10 cents) by the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 11 Park Place, New York City. It is a reprint of the informing and highly commended address which Miss Bateman delivered at the Henry George Congress in Toronto last September, and makes a survey of the tenure and distribution of land in a number of countries including Great Britain, Germany, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Czecho-Slovakia, Russia, Spain, Japan, China, South Africa, Northern Nigeria, Australia, New Zealand, South America, Mexico, the U.S.A., Canada, and with a special section on Denmark.

The Golders Green "Parliament" (extensively reported in the *Hendon Times* of 11th November) debated an "Employment and Public Works Bill" introduced by the Labour party in power. Mr F. W. T. Krohn, speaking from the Liberal benches, urged that the measure should include provisions for dealing with the taxation of land values.