



# The passions of a backbench campaigner

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ENEMY OF INJUSTICE  
The Life of Andrew MacLaren  
by Malcolm Hill  
Othila Press, £15 (hdbk), £7.95 (ppbk)



respected by most of his colleagues and formed warm relationships with those of opposing parties. Bernard Shaw was convinced that he would become Minister of Land, so great was the impact his speeches had on Parliament. For all that, he remained on the back benches for all his 20 years in Westminster.

One quote from this biography has remained in my mind. It can only have come from someone who experienced the Great War, and I felt it

The year 1945 was not a seminal year for the land reform movement in Britain. The new clutch of Labour MPs made the Labour Party a different animal from that which existed before the war. Gone were those Liberals who gave the Labour Party a less socialist face, including Andrew MacLaren, who lost his seat at Burslem and Tunstall in the Potteries. Two other stalwarts also soon left the scene – Lord Douglas of Barloch, who was sent to Malta as Governor General, and Richard Stokes, who was tragically killed in a car accident. The Labour Party was now fully socialist, and its efforts to deal with the land problem bore no resemblance to the attempts before the war.

This biography of Andrew MacLaren shows not only the dedication, determination and skill with which he pressed for land reform, but also just how close we came to getting LVT on the statute books.

For years, MacLaren was, for me, an enigma. I first ventured into 177 Vauxhall Bridge Road in 1961. This was the London home of Georgist activists. I soon found that the School of Economic Science, founded by MacLaren in 1937, was considered, well, 'not quite right'. Imagine my surprise when I was asked by 177 to deliver some papers to MacLaren at his studio flat in south-west London. I don't know what he thought of me because I sat there reeking of "turps". I was wearing a brand new suit and, on my way, had walked under some scaffolding when the workmen dropped a pot of white paint all over me! It was outside a public house and I was able to wash my hair to some extent, and the workmen used "turps" to sponge down my suit. Andrew was not at all disconcerted and I learned a lot, during our chat, about the background to the rivalry between the SES and 177, which seemed of very little account.

Malcolm Hill's account is touchingly told, with many examples of MacLaren's speeches, both in and out of Parliament. Although land and poverty are the main focus of the book, his other passions are not

forgotten. He loved painting and was a skilled caricaturist, as the picture plates show, but "music remained the most ineffable art for him". There are some fascinating stories about MacLaren and music, including the one where he left a Malcolm Sargent concert at the interval because "he was showing off at the expense of the music".

But land is the main focus of the biography. MacLaren's interest started early, perhaps through his Irish grandmother, who fulminated over the refrain that Britannia ruled the waves. "It is land we need, not waves. In Ireland, we have shot more landlords than any country on God's earth, but in England they put them in castles and call them gentlemen."

He was 25 when he read *Progress & Poverty*. He felt that this book brought together his spiritual and artistic quests. But Karl Marx also played a part in Andrew's education. He often quoted passages from *Das Kapital*, which he knew by heart: "Thus were the agricultural people first forcibly expropriated from the soil, driven from their homes, turned into vagabonds, and then whipped, branded, tortured by laws grotesquely terrible, into the discipline necessary for the wage system."

Andrew MacLaren was an MP from 1922 until 1945, with breaks in 1924 and 1935 for a few years. He was well

had some poignancy and encapsulated what the land reform movement was saying: "It is no good saying: 'Rise and sweep all men into the army for the defence of the country', and then saying to them: 'After all, you are merely trespassers on the land of the country'.... Either this is the land of the people or the people are trespassers. ... (Members have said) it is dangerous that people should be allowed to walk more freely in the country. It is not dangerous to defend it; only to go about it."