

## GLASGOW MUNICIPAL GENERAL ELECTION

2nd November 1920

20th (NORTH KELVIN) WARD

Candidature of Ex-Bailie Peter Burt, J.P.

### ADDRESS TO THE ELECTORS

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—My record as a citizen actively interested and engaged in public affairs is before you. I was a Member of the Council and a Magistrate of the City during the twelve years 1889 to 1901. That was a period in which great improvements were made in the public services. Municipal tramways, electricity and river purification were inaugurated and developed. These activities, in which I took a leading part, were necessary for the convenience and health of the citizens, but I perceived that they would have one certain result—to increase the value of land and promote land speculation, thus compelling the ratepayers to pay the land owners of Glasgow for the benefits of all this Municipal enterprise.

At the same time I pointed out that the housing question could never be solved as long as houses were taxed and valuable vacant land was exempt from taxation. I therefore advocated and worked for the Rating of Land Values and the abolition of taxation on houses and improvements.

The question of Land Values Taxation was first raised by me in the Glasgow City Council in February, 1890. The Corporation promoted a great national campaign to secure powers from Parliament to levy Rates on the Value of Land. The Government of the day promised legislation and progress was carried to the point of making for the year 1909 a Valuation of all the land in the Kingdom. The promise to the Municipalities that they would be allowed to use that Valuation for rating purposes has never been fulfilled.

The present Government have since refused to make public the result of the Land Valuation. It is monstrous that very important data, collected at public expense, is thus withheld from public knowledge. It will be my purpose, if returned, to have the figures for Glasgow, which are lying now in Government offices in Glasgow, added up and revealed. They will show what was the Value of the Land of Glasgow in 1909 and will indicate the enormous fund which is available for the payment of the public services, the cost of which is now so unjustly made a burden upon houses, improvements and industry.

Provisions for the Rating of Land Values will require to be preceded by a revised Valuation, because values have changed since 1909, but the revision can be speedily effected. It is my firm conviction that the total selling value of the land of Glasgow is not less than £120,000,000, which means (at 6 per cent.) that a sum of more than £7,000,000 is taken annually from the people of Glasgow by the landowners of Glasgow who pay not a single penny out of this sum in rates. Holding that view, I entirely repudiate the suggestion that expenditure on the welfare of the City must be retrenched. More than enough revenue exists in the value of the land, which is created by the community and belongs to the community, to pay for and provide the amenities of which Glasgow is at present starved by land monopoly and an iniquitous system of taxation.

In the matter of housing, the policy of land purchase and housing subsidies can only end in disastrous results. One need only point to the ghastly failure of the City Improvement Trust whose methods were based on the same utter lack of principle. Slums were merely shifted from one area to another at a cost to the ratepayers

of over £1,000,000. This expenditure caused a wave of violent land speculation, resulting in widespread unemployment and ruin to many families.

I am definitely opposed to a repetition of this insane policy of wasting public money to raise the price of land and of building materials. Its necessary outcome is the letting of houses at uneconomic rents, the deficit having to be made good by taxes laid on the ratepayers. Three years have gone since the Government initiated the new housing policy. Sir John Lindsay recently said that Glasgow needs 57,000 houses at once. The Medical Officer of Health has said there are 13,000 houses in Glasgow unfit for human habitation. But what has been done? Up to August last only 92 houses had been built, and you have had instance after instance of ruinous land purchase like that at Merryflats where the Council proposed to buy land at £425 per acre which was rated at only £4 per acre. Your Assessor has stated in a public document that there are about 10,000 acres in Glasgow suitable for building which are estimated to be worth £3,700,000 and which in 1918-19 paid less than £3,000 in rates. Contrast these figures with the fact that the remaining 9,000 acres of used land paid nearly £3,000,000 of rates in the same year. Can one be surprised that houses are scarce?

Housing, the land question, and local taxation reform are intimately related. I maintain that the housing problem can be solved quickly, economically and permanently by transferring rates to the value of land whether it is used or not.

I come forward as a candidate principally with the desire to raise this question again in the Council. The municipal agitation for the Rating of Land Values has lately been revived by the City and Town Councils of Manchester, Bradford, Cardiff, Swansea, Hull, Inverness, and scores of other large centres. Rating reform comes definitely within the sphere of local administration, and it will be my aim to encourage the Glasgow City Council once again to exert its great influence in this direction.

I would make a special appeal to the women electors of the Ward. Women have become a real factor in the control of municipal affairs. We all know that they are the ultimate custodians of the domestic purse. The increased cost of living, high rents and heavy rates are due to the unjust taxation which enables the land monopolist to escape his due contribution. Therefore women electors are particularly interested in supporting my demand in favour of the Rating of Land Values.

In every election in which I have been a candidate I have had the undivided support of the Temperance Party because I have always been in favour of local option. I welcome the new Act which is now being put in operation as giving effect to this principle. I pledge myself to see that, whatever the decision of the locality may be, the Act shall be faithfully administered.

I think I may justly claim that my long experience in the municipal and commercial affairs of my native city affords sufficient guarantee of my ability to discharge the many and responsible duties that may fall upon me in the way of control and administration of the various departments of our world-renowned Corporation.

I urge upon each individual elector not to think his or her vote of little importance but to exercise the right to take a share in determining the future policy of the city government.

I have the honour to be,

Yours faithfully,

PETER BURT.

77, West Nile Street, Glasgow,

20th October, 1920,