



Politics and Principals

By EUSTACE DAVIES

Mr. Eustace Davies is a retired solicitor and a member of the United Committee

MY FIRST introduction to the Movement for Land Value Taxation was through Mr. Edward McHugh, of Liverpool, who way back in the eighties arranged meetings in this country for Henry George. He was a member of the United Committee and a regular contributor to the *South Wales Daily News* (a pro-Liberal paper). Among the other activities of this learned and enthusiastic man was the running of study classes on the economics and philosophy of Henry George, and many of his students were members of the Cardiff Branch of the National League of Young Liberals.

I had at this time already read *Progress and Poverty* and had been deeply impressed by George's logic and humanity, by the clarity of his vision and depth of sincerity.

I called on Mr. McHugh, hoping to join his classes, but to my disappointment found that he was shortly to give up his office and leave Cardiff. However, he welcomed me and as a parting gift gave me a copy of Henry George's *A Perplexed Philosopher*, suggesting that this would be most fitting for one in my profession. I soon became associated with the local Young Liberals and it was at their request that I took over the job of honorary secretary of the Welsh League for the Taxation of Land Values when the position became vacant.

My work with the League gave me a deeper insight into what Georgeism meant and strengthened my desire to do something substantial (with the co-operation of any friends and the United Committee in London) towards bringing our ideas to a wider audience. It was at about this time that I was invited, through the sponsorship of Mr. William Reid, of Glasgow, who followed Mr. McHugh, to become a member of the United Committee.

Our chief speaker over the years was Fred Skirrow and he did wonderful work among miners' lodges and other trade union groups. Several tours were arranged for him which were often of two weeks' duration.

Fred Skirrow was a frequent guest at our home where we often entertained figures of national repute during those strenuous days of political propaganda. Among visiting speakers were Francis Neilson, C.B., Arthur Madsen, F.C.R., Douglas (now Lord Douglas of Barloch), Andrew McClaren and John Paul. These were days of meetings, conferences, petitions and of ceaseless correspondence on

land values among newspapers, public figures and political bodies and all the bustling activities at national and local elections.

In 1928 I took a post with the Cardiff Corporation, and Mr. C. A. Gardner, assisted by Mr. Edgar Buck, who had joined me a year earlier, carried on with the strenuous routine work of the League. I subsequently resumed my secretaryship but I was feeling the strain of the responsibility of my position. I hoped that some interested well-placed person would take over from me. A compromise was reached, and while successive hon. organising secretaries took over much of the work, I retained, at the request of members, the office of hon. secretary because of my long familiarity with the work of the League.

But my health was on the downward grade and in 1936 I had a complete breakdown—and a duodenal ulcer. From then on until my retirement I had to take things more easily. Throughout these years Mrs. Davies gave her own willing and self-imposed service to the movement and it was a grievous loss when after a protracted illness of several years we lost her in 1958.

In the inter-war years the Young Liberals were the chief source of strength in the League, but in later years the support of many of them fell away. In politics, expediency was supplanting principle and as we knew only too well, the road of expediency was to be the road to near oblivion. But now that expediency has failed also, for the Conservative Party, the Liberals have another chance. Will they repeat their mistake?

Our experience with the Labour Party was not dissimilar though more severe. We counted among our members and supporters a number of Labour people. Several of them were on the Cardiff City Council and members of the League, and at one time it appeared that we might develop fast with their active co-operation. But it was not to be. Their leaders were too deeply committed to Socialism and their loyalty to their Party was stronger than their loyalty to the principles the League advocated. Because of criticism of the Labour Party's policies at a meeting, they walked out as a body. They thought that the Labour Party's "land reform" policy was "going our way" and that the League should accept it as a partial solution to the land problem. They could not see that their party's policies would put an end (almost) to the chances of

Georgeist policy being ultimately adopted.

The history and fate of Labour's 1947 *Town and Country Planning Act* is too well known for me to repeat. Expediency had once again failed. One of the difficulties of our situation is that we operate on a non-party basis—we owe no party allegiances. At our headquarters in London, the parties' policies in turn come under scrutiny and if criticism is called for, it comes — without fear or favour. But no delight is taken in the often frustrating business of exposing fallacious economic arguments and timid and often reactionary political proposals designed to "solve" (always by some form of state socialism) our pressing social problems. The price of sticking to principles is often to plough a lone furrow.

But we still have friends in the political parties and they are growing in number each day thanks to the efforts of a new generation, many of whom have been trained at the Henry George School of Social Science.

The story of the later years of the Welsh League centred in Cardiff is in part the story of the other leagues—hope,

partial success, decline, renewed hope, and then steady but real progress with the impetus given by the Henry George Schools.

After the second world war, the League was sadly in need of new blood. Our ranks had been greatly depleted by removals, deaths, and lapsed memberships. There was no other way but to merge the various independent leagues into the reconstituted Land Value Taxation League centred in London and operating with the United Committee. It was just prior to this that Fred Jones came to Cardiff and when the position became clear he, Edgar Buck and Fred Giggs started a branch of the Henry George School, which has proved a most successful venture growing in strength each year. The School is training the propagandists of today and the future and already our voice is growing louder in the land.

I rejoice that what I have been able to do throughout the years has brought its own reward—and many lifelong friends.

BOOK REVIEWS

"A Tax By Any Other Name...?"

By ROBERT MILLER

HOUSING (Britain in the Sixties series) by Stanley Alderson
(Penguin Special, 3s. 6d.)

NONE but the coldly indifferent can fail to be impressed by Mr. Stanley Alderson's obvious sincerity and concern in his book on housing.

The first thing we read, on the flyleaf, is a quotation of Eric Lyons in the *Daily Herald*: "What I want people to do is look beyond the facade of Euston Arch and see the slums of St. Pancras. When they do that, something's bound to happen." It is sadly true that not nearly enough people do just that; if many more saw the slums as Mr. Alderson sees them, something would be bound to happen, and happen so much sooner. However, he says: "The housing problem has twenty different sides to it and needs to be attacked on them all at once — but not without a certain amount of co-ordination." Whether or not it is advisable, or necessary, to attack an enemy on as many as twenty fronts, with or without proper co-ordination, is of course debatable, but that this problem cries out for urgent radical remedies is indisputable.

It was pleasantly surprising to discover that "in a literal sense, the housing shortage is regional only. The Census (1961) divides England and Wales into ten regions. In nine of the ten there are more dwellings than households... In well over half the 400-odd areas outside London the number of dwellings exceeded the number of households by at least 1.5 per cent." It is, as he points out, the other way round in London and certain other large cities.



"The fact that houses cannot be moved has perhaps more to do with the shortage than is generally recognised. At the same time, we know that the greater part of the country is not prepared to be told it has no housing shortage." Very true; and it helps greatly if we try to view the problem in the correct perspective. "The explanation is that many people are dissatisfied with the houses they have."

Mr. Alderson has the gift of quoting statistics in an easily digestible manner, and of restating unsavoury facts in such a way as to revive afresh our indignation. He reminds the reader of the actual number of houses which lack bathrooms and proper sanitation, and makes this repetition sound like urgent news, which of course it is, and has been for far longer than we care to admit. He is not very thrilled with the rate at which these deficiencies are being made good: "Not even the combination of the Rent Act and improvement grants is doing much to reduce these proportions. About 26,000 baths a year are being installed in private property. At this rate it will take a century and a quarter to equip the more than three million privately rented houses that now have either no bath or a shared one... It is a safe assumption that we have three million houses that we ought to pull down right away."

Mr. Alderson covers the problem from every angle: from that of the council tenant, the private tenant, the