

LAND & LIBERTY

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THE KEY TO SOCIAL PROSPERITY

THE TIME has come when people sincerely interested in the solution of the social problem must get down to first principles. The welter of discussion about currency, banking, prices, and so on, simply obscures the main issues.

Men do not live on money. They live on commodities. Money is only an instrument for effecting exchanges. Stocks and shares are not wealth—only title to wealth, evidence of ownership. Real wealth consists of houses, factories, food, clothing and commodities of all kinds.

To increase money does not increase wealth. When Germany printed marks by the hundred million, the people of Germany were no better off. But the mark notes became so plentiful that they became worthless.

All wealth is produced by human labour, applied to the land. By land, of course, is meant all kinds of land—agricultural, coal-fields, brickfields, building sites, everything supplied by nature.

Articles not produced in this country, but imported from abroad, are obtained by exchanging the products of British industry. In the last analysis, therefore, everything we have is obtained by the products of British labour applied to British land.

It is commonly believed that there is a great stock of wealth in existence. True, houses last for many years, furniture for a shorter time, clothing a still shorter, food and many other things have to be produced and consumed from day to day.

It has been estimated by one of the most competent statisticians in the United States (the late Mr A. C. Pleydell) that the whole of the wealth of that country (taking the average of what has a long life with what has a short life) does not represent more than two (or at most three) years' production.

Those who think the world is really suffering from over-production would do well to ponder this fact. In a very real sense mankind lives from hand to mouth.

The two primary factors of production are land and labour. All of us have the power wherewith to labour, except those incapacitated by youth, old age, or infirmity. But we do not all own the *means whereon* to labour. The ownership of land is in the hands of a comparatively few persons.

Those who own land have the power to deprive the landless of the opportunity of earning a living. They also have the power of appropriating the values which attach to land.

Social progress continually raises land values. The

aggregation of men into communities, the development of towns, the building of roads and railways, the provision of public services, all make land more and more valuable. Invention, discovery, improvements in the art of producing wealth, while they reduce the price of commodities increase the value of land. "The landlord sleeps but thrives."

The owners of land have the power to hold land out of use; and they exercise that power. Turn where you will, on the outskirts of towns you find valuable building land held out of use. In the country millions of acres are unused or hardly used, held by the owners for sport, social prestige, or vainglory.

Whenever industry is most active, land speculation becomes most rampant until the speculative price of land rises so high that production is checked and a period of industrial setback results. The depression which overcame the United States and many other countries since 1930 can be traced directly to this source. Significant evidence is given on the point by Professor George Geiger in his latest book *The Theory of the Land Question*.

Whenever we attempt even to palliate the evil of unemployment or spend money on housing schemes and useful and necessary public works, we come up against the land question. The instances we have quoted in these columns showing the working of the land monopoly provide testimony that cannot be refuted. A typical case was the new Lambeth Bridge in London, costing £839,000 of which no less than £102,500 was compensation for land, etc. In six schemes of this kind, including Lambeth Bridge, the Bath Road and street widenings or bridges or new roads in Swansea, Liverpool, Hampton Court and Manchester-Stockport, landlords received no less than £81 for each man who obtained a year's employment. Apart from this, the effect of all such improvements is to increase land value, and the landlords will get increased rent for ever as a result of them.

For ever? Perhaps not for ever, but so long as we continue to tolerate such a topsy-turvy system. But we do tolerate it now and to-day there are influential voices calling on the Government to "prepare for the coming slump" by planning schemes of public works to be paid for out of tax levies or debts—and harden again the monopoly price of land.

We are paying an enormous burden of taxation in the shape of local rates on our houses, tariffs on food, clothing, furniture, and all the necessities of life. Every commodity is being made scarcer and dearer.

Yet there is an enormous fund, the value of land, growing every year after year, created by society itself, which we allow to be appropriated by private individuals. The workers are thus robbed of the fruits of social progress, but the greatest injustice of all is that millions of men are held out of employment. A cut-throat competition for jobs arises, and wages are driven down to a mere subsistence level.

No tinkering with currency, nor all the palliatives advocated on all sides can alter this basic fact. None of these things does anything to alter the vested rights which enable the few to appropriate what has been produced by the many.

The first immediate step is to pass a Finance Act which will levy a tax upon a valuation of all

land apart from improvements, the valuation being periodically revised and therefore kept up to date. The Act would at the same time reduce the taxes on trade and production and it would be followed (the valuation having been made) by a Bill requiring local authorities to abolish rates on houses and other buildings and to raise their revenues by a rate on land values.

These two measures are the practical, sound and just direction public policy must take toward establishing the equal rights of all to the use of land. When every landholder is called upon to make contribution based on the true value of the land whether it is used or not, the opportunities now withheld would be made available and land speculation would become impossible.

Wages would rise, the cost of living would fall, and the community would grow richer and richer in the enjoyment of the communal fund of land value which social progress is constantly increasing.

F. C. R. D.

DAMAGE BY DEER

At a conference of the National Farmers' Union of Scotland, the Highland and Agricultural Society, The Scottish Chamber of Agriculture, the Blackface Sheepbreeders Association and the Cheviot Sheep Society held in Edinburgh on 2nd December, a resolution was adopted calling on the Government to prevent land from being used for deer forests unless licensed by the Department of Agriculture, enabling farmers to take and kill deer straying on their lands, and other measures for preventing damage by deer.

These proposals were endorsed by the Central Executive of the Farmers' Union at its meeting in Glasgow on 16th December.

One speaker, Mr Scott, Fearn, Ross-shire, said that this demand was a political stunt. The sheep farmer who was next a deer forest was often the best-off man in the district. (Laughter.)

Mr Bruce observed that if deer were such a benefit how came it that when he stood as a Parliamentary candidate for Caithness he was inundated with questions for the control of deer.

Mr R. Barr, Callander, said that in Central and West Perthshire at present the deer nuisance was appalling. They had come down from the hills in the recent snowstorms, and on farms where a deer was a sight not many years ago they had now been seen in hundreds—on some farms 400 to 500. The farmers could do nothing.

But there are still sentimental writers in the Press who deplore any tendency towards breaking up these pleasure grounds of the rich.

A DEFENCE OF SMALL HOLDINGS

The Central Executive Committee of the National Farmers Union meeting at Glasgow on 16th December considered a resolution deploring the breaking up of land into small holdings. The mover of the resolution contended that it resulted in good farming land being left derelict, but this view was contradicted by others who took part in the discussion.

Mr Mathew Goss, Mousewald, Dumfries, said that while in Dumfriesshire the small holdings movement had been a success and was the quickest way of re-

populating the rural areas, it was wrong to take over a good farm for that purpose. They should place the smallholders on waste places instead. (Laughter.)

Mr Alex. Buchanan, Garscadden Mains, Bearsden, said that what was wanted was more discrimination in the official selection of the smallholders. Numbers of people holding other jobs took these small holdings for the sake of the house provided, and neglected the land attached. For poultry and pigs the rougher land was quite suitable.

Mr A. G. Norrie, Cairnhill, Turriff, said that it would be a great pity if it went forth that the Farmers' Union did not approve of small holdings. It would be absurd for the Government to settle smallholders on waste or poor land. In Aberdeenshire they had probably more small holdings than in any other county, and where they had 50 or 60 acres to work, these people were really an asset to the whole county.

Mr William Bruce, Seton Mains, Longniddry, said that market-gardening was one of the lines most suitable for smallholders. Such enterprise was hopeless except on good land. Even where large farms were well farmed, a market-gardener could take more produce per acre than the large farmer. They must not stem the flow back to the land, even if some good farmers might be dispossessed.

We may suggest to the Farmers' Union that if rates and taxes were levied on the value of the land apart from improvements there would soon not be much good land left derelict.

The able services of Mr Owen Roberts, who has retired from the Southgate Council, will be much missed by his colleagues. His voice has been raised repeatedly in protest against the wrongs of the existing rating system and repeatedly he has urged the rating of land values. He has been member for three years and did not seek re-election. He kept his agitation going to the end by the resolution he moved (*Wood Green Weekly Herald*, 29th October) and the considerable debate he promoted on the subject of land values. The resolution was defeated by only one vote (10 to 9), several members abstaining.

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An extra large batch of newspaper clippings received in December shows great activity in the matter of letters to the newspapers, and reports of meetings held. Among those taking part were not only the numerous writers frequently mentioned in our "News of the Movement" section but also other correspondents like Mr D. Cleghorn Thomson in the *Scotsman*, Mr Charles E. Berry (a long letter on Dictatorships and the Land Question) in the *Herald and Express* of Torquay, Mr Frank Dupuis in the *East Anglian Daily Times*, and Mr R. R. Stokes in the *Tribune*. The *Glasgow Weekly Herald* reported the meeting of the Southern "Parliament" in Glasgow when it sat as a Glasgow Corporation and carried by a substantial majority a resolution, moved by Mr H. G. Rae and seconded by Mr A. S. Munsie, calling on the Parliamentary Bills Committee to prepare a Bill for the transfer of local rating from houses, shops and offices to the sites values of land.

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FIFTY YEARS AGO (*Glasgow Herald*, 12th December). Mr (W. E.) Gladstone, replying to a correspondent at Bristol, remarks that all bounties on sugar are, in his opinion, based on folly and injustice, and that he hopes all men of all parties will wish well to every effort to destroy them.