

## NEWS—FOREIGN.

## NEW SOUTH WALES.

RATES FOR 1912—LANDOWNERS VOTE FOR  
LAND-VALUE RATING—CRAZY POLICY OF  
GOVERNMENT LAND PURCHASE FOR SET-  
TLEMENT—THE HIGH COST OF LIVING—  
A. G. HUIE TRAVELS 4000 MILES AND  
ADDRESSES 43 MEETINGS.

Municipal and Shire Councils are publishing their estimates for the year. In most cases the rates as a matter of course are imposed on land values. We have at last won at North Sydney. In that suburb advantage was taken of a flaw in the Act to put a small proportion of the rates on improved values for three years. The pressure of public opinion, without resort to a poll, which in this case was impossible, has forced the Council to revert to rating solely on land values. There are still a few cases in small scattered centres and country towns which rate partly on improvements. That, however, is only due to the want of a man or two locally to take the matter up in earnest. Wherever a poll has been demanded it has always been carried in favor of the land-values rating, although the right to vote at polls is confined to landowners. It has been simply a case of the land users, who are in a majority, outvoting the land speculators. Our Local Government Act makes provision in Municipalities (not in Shires except temporarily) to borrow money for permanent work. Loan proposals have to be approved first by the Local Government Department, and then a ratepayers poll is taken in the area concerned. Two questions are submitted at such polls. First, "Are you in favor of the personal loan?" Second, "How shall the rate for interest and sinking fund be raised, from unimproved or from improved values?" Such polls are taken from time to time. The wisdom of borrowing may or may not commend itself to the ratepayers, but the verdict is always in favor of the loan rate being on unimproved land values. So far as the City is concerned the Labor Government has done nothing. It is so busy attending to such minor matters as

starting State brickworks, timber yards, building "houses for the workers" and other matters that it has not got back to bed-rock—the land question.

## £378,952 FROM LAND VALUES.

Some particulars of the rates imposed may be of interest. Each Council estimates what its expenditure will be for the year, and the amount of revenue it is likely to receive apart from rates. Then it proposes a rate or rates to raise the necessary amount. Many councils have one rate of so much in the pound to raise what they want. Others have local, loan, special or water rates according to the fancies of the aldermen of the needs of the case. In some cases there is really no need to have more than one rate while in others the law makes it necessary. So far as I have collected particulars of rates proposed for 1912 from the published notices of 62 Municipal and Shire Councils in all parts of the State, the highest general rate is 6d. and the lowest 1d. in the pound. There are some local and other rates for sums of less than a penny but the bulk of the revenue is provided by the general rate. The total unimproved value of the land is £29,113,313. Of the 62 councils 56 imposed their rates entirely on land values. The remaining 6 councils raise £21,299 from land values, and £5,084 from improvements. The total amount proposed to be raised by the 62 councils from the unimproved value of land is £378,952. The sum of £5,084 additional raised by 6 councils from improvements is scarcely worth mentioning. Your readers will see how generally land value rating has been adopted although the law would allow councils, if they so desire, to raise a large proportion of the £378,952 from improvements. The ratepayers have almost universally condemned taxation of improvements. They only need the power in other States and countries and I am satisfied that they would speedily follow our example and exempt improvements.

## LAND SETTLEMENT.

The question of settling the people on the land is always with us. We have

plenty of land—some 200,000,000 acres of it—and the inhabitants of most parts of the State will tell you that its quality is such that it "will grow anything." Still there is a great scarcity of good land for settlement purposes.

The latest official returns show that 21,791,982 acres are in the hands of 711 holders. It was rather worse some years ago, but the decrease in the largest estates is counterbalanced by an increase in estates from 5,000 to 10,000 acres. The policy of the late Wade Government was to buy out big estates. Nearly three millions sterling have been expended in this way to get 737,689 acres of land to make 1500 farms. The prices charged to settlers for the resumed land were so high that more than half the settlers have had to apply for suspension of payment of instalments. Some of the resumed land is still on the Government's hands. Land made available in this way is beyond the reach of poor men. It is a fine thing for the big landowner. He gets a good price in cash. He appropriates the value which the people have made, while those who get the Closer Settlement farms are loaded with heavy payments for nearly 40 years. The action of the Government in attempting to buy out land monopolists has also assisted to force up land values generally, and so to make the position worse.

The present Government has stopped this insane policy. Of course, they are roundly condemned by Mr. Wade, but they are perfectly right on that question. The only way to destroy land monopoly is to tax it so that it will not pay. While the Labor Government has very properly stopped the Wade resumption policy, it has not had the courage to substitute anything for it. It is relying upon making Crown lands available. That would be all right if there were plenty of Crown lands suitable for settlement. While there is still a good deal of Crown land it is at present too far from the railway to be worked with advantage. Of course, we continue building railways ostensibly to open up such land and incidentally to double the value of large estates in the districts served, which of course goes to the private landowner. In that way the

State has obtained a long list of non-paying railways, while it cannot provide settlers with sufficient cheap accessible land. There is enough good land near existing railways to meet all present needs, but land monopolists hold it. Effective use of such lands would make all those unprofitable railways pay well, and yet we are getting deeper and deeper into debt, building more railways which cannot pay for years to come.

#### THE INCOME TAX AND STAMP TAXES.

The Government professed to find itself very short of money some months ago. That was a splendid opportunity for it to come forward with a land value tax without exemptions, which would have operated to break up large estates and promote closer settlement in addition to providing revenue. But it forgot all the professed anxiety of its members and supporters in favor of land value taxation and came forward with an income tax and fresh stamp taxes. Such taxes are economically unsound. They retard rather than promote the use of land. Apparently these unjust and vexatious taxes will be passed and it will not be easy to get them removed. You see, therefore, that our position is unenviable. Neither Liberal nor Labor party will go straight. Mr. Wade would revert to the hopeless monopolistic policy of State resumption of private lands for settlement. Mr. McGowan is adopting unsound taxation proposals, and is committing the country to heavy expenditure on socialistic experiments, while neglecting the extension of those services which are of an essentially public character. What we have done in the way of taxing land values for local purposes is good, it is popular, it has fulfilled expectations. What we need are State and Federal Governments which will also raise their revenue from land values and exempt industry.

#### THE BRISBANE STRIKE.

In N. S. W. the tramways are run by the State Government. In some of the other States they are in the hands of private companies. The Brisbane tramways are run by a company which has an American for a manager named Badger.

Mr. Badger has had some trouble with his employees, nothing very serious, nothing that could not be readily settled by the Arbitration Court. One of the company's rules was against the wearing of badges. The union recently decided that its members should wear a badge without waiting for the matter to be settled by the Court. The manager suspended those who put their badges on. The men went on strike.

This was followed by all the unions in Brisbane going on strike in sympathy with the tramway men. Since then the strike has been very generally extended throughout the State, except that most of the men on the Government railways have stayed at work. Business was soon paralyzed. Hotels, warehouses and shops of all sorts were closed. For a little while it seemed as though the Government was powerless. But it soon aroused itself, cleared the streets, and took vigorous steps to preserve order. It applied to the Federal Government for the aid of the military forces. That was refused. Then it called for volunteers for special police, both foot and mounted, and soon had plenty of men.

The first effort to starve the populace into agreeing with the union demands completely failed. For a couple of days it was very difficult for many to get even bread and meat, but gradually conditions are becoming normal. Brisbane largely depends upon the southern States for foodstuffs. As all the shipping is laid up apparently the strikers hope that starvation may yet help them to win. There are threats of calling out all the unionists in the other States, but I do not think it will come to that on this occasion. So far as I can judge at the time of writing the general strike is collapsing.

It is quite possible that we will yet have an attempted general strike in Australia. No doubt it will fail, for it is a hair-brained venture that only wild socialists would advocate. Fancy a general strike over wearing a few union badges. Of course, the unionists say that they are fighting for the "principles of unionism." It is, however, at times, difficult to understand what is involved in those principles. It is also asserted that the strike is really intended

to influence the general State elections which take place in three or four months time. When will unionists acquire sense enough to join the radical forces in the community in a strike through the ballot box, at land monopoly and protection so that men may become free and such expensive expedients as unions will be no longer necessary?

#### THE HIGH COST OF LIVING.

The excessive cost of living in Australia is one of the problems of the day. Wages generally are good, work is abundant, but the higher cost of goods largely neutralises the advantages gained. Our measure of prosperity has been gained in spite of the serious handicap of a protective tariff. We have had a run of good years. The world has paid us good prices for our primary products. These advantages have enabled us to pay the high prices and still feel tolerably well. Of course, protectionists falsely assert that our prosperity is due to the tariff. It is highly probable that the next few years will tell a different story. Already the continued dry weather is causing anxiety. In some of the Northern districts the wheat crops have failed. We have made so little preparation to conserve water so as to be in some measure independent of the rainfall, that a drought will cause serious losses. We will then really feel the effect of high prices. Perhaps a little real suffering will knock some sense into those who have been fooled by the special pleaders for the tariff. In the cables appearing in our papers to-day the Washington correspondent of the *London Times* is quoted as referring to the growing suspicion in the United States that the "tariff was the mother of trusts." With our tariff we are copying the bad American example. Trusts are developing. The sugar monopoly already costs consumers a million and a half for sugar yearly over and above its true value. That comes to 6s. per head per annum.

#### THE SECRETARY'S TOURS.

For reasons given as well as others we have felt for some months that the time is opportune for vigorous propaganda work in support of Free Trade and taxation of

land values. Part of the work undertaken was a series of trips by the Secretary to country districts. The plan adopted may be explained by an example. Arrive at a country town early in the morning. Start at once distributing leaflets showing the cause of high prices and how to reduce them. A notice of the place of meeting is on the leaflet. After breakfast go round the business portion of the town handing out leaflets, enrolling new subscribers to our paper *The Standard*, and selling George's "Progress and Poverty," "Protection or Free-Trade" and other books. In that way you meet a lot of people, have a good many brief arguments on points raised, and materially help to advertise the night's meeting.

Of course, advertisements are previously inserted in the local papers. The meeting is held in the open air at the most suitable street corner to get a crowd. The address is a plain talk upon the subject with some local coloring added. Then the speaker invites questions. Sometimes there are none, or perhaps a few, or question time may occupy an hour. Notes of the address up to a column, in a few cases a column and a half, must be supplied to the local papers. That is necessary to secure a report in some cases, while it is usually appreciated. It saves the country reporter, who is usually not an expert, time and trouble. Besides that you get in the points you want to place before the public. The next day do the same and so on. I spend one, two, or three days in a town according to its size and importance.

I have now had five trips of about a fortnight each in the latter half of the month from September 1911 to January 1912. I have travelled 4,168 miles, almost all by train, addressed 43 meetings, all but four of them being in the open air, personally distributed about 30,000 leaflets, enrolled 355 new subscribers to our paper *The Standard*, and sold £12.10. worth of books for cash. The reports in 60 papers have averaged about a column. Someone is really wanted on such a mission all the time in this State. It was my intention to go on four more trips to other districts in the latter half of February and May inclusive, but our Assistant Organizer

has resigned and we have had to abandon the plan for the present. What we have to do is to create a public sentiment in favor of our principles, and the best way is to go as directly as possible to the people, state our case and get them to read our literature.—A. G. HURR, Sydney, N. S. W.

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### ENGLAND.

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The labor unrest is the principal item of table talk in Great Britain today. For the moment emigration is being overlooked; the housing question goes hand in hand with the boot, bread and butcher meat questions, and we are turning our attention to the poverty question which includes all these things.

The working people are beginning to think not only that they are not getting their proportion of the increased wealth, but that their share is actually a diminishing quantity. Free Trade lecturers have been showing what a wealthy people we are judged by the average £4 per family per week, but this kind of comparison fills no empty cupboards. Men who would in ordinary circumstances run away from statistics are beginning to quote figures to show that money wages have risen 15% in the last dozen years, but that the cost of living has risen 18%.

In all such movements there is room for the demagogue and the charlatan. We are in the midst of a movement engineered by some Socialists who are a bit premature in their idea of "sacking the gaffer." Syndicalism is on the top wave, and general strikes are in fashion. A railway strike was threatened, and a coal strike is now in progress.

The men can be got out easily enough by such manoeuvring, but the leaders are not finding it easy to get them in again on any better terms. Today the members of the Cabinet are on their trial. They are being denounced by all sorts of irresponsible people who probably will be denounced in turn later on. When people see that there is no use in running their heads up against immovable objects they will hardly thank the people who led them to believe that there was.