

AT THE LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE

The Annual Conference of the Labour Party was held at Liverpool on Tuesday, 29th September, and during the week.

Mr. Philip Snowden, speaking (1st October) in support of a comprehensive resolution on finance and calling for "a tax, based on a national valuation to be imposed upon the unimproved capital value of land and minerals," said he congratulated the Executive on having put before the Conference a concise, definite, and complete statement of the Socialist principles of national finance. The first part dealt with food taxes. He assured them that if the Labour Government had remained in office there would have been no food taxes left in the fiscal system of this country. The second part affirmed their opposition to protective duties. It was no criticism of Free Trade to attribute to it a failure which was in no sense due to it. A Free Trade policy was nothing more than a condition; it was not an active force. Protection, on the other hand, was a most vicious form of monopoly which benefited the capitalist at the expense of the worker.

This question was of special importance at the present moment, when they had repeated statements from the Chancellor of the Exchequer that his policy was to transfer income tax and the estate duties and other forms of direct taxation to indirect taxation, so that, in his phrase, the basis of taxation would be broadened. In that way more taxation would be put on the backs of the workers and the rich would be relieved.

He assured the Conference that had the Labour Government been able to introduce its second Budget the most prominent feature of it would have been a drastic proposal for the taxation of land values. The appropriation of the increasing value of land owing to the mobility of transport was a matter of great urgency. Rural land was being turned into urban land at a great rate; some of it increased five, ten, and even twenty times within a single year. It was a perfect scandal that the extra value should go into the pockets of the landowning class, and that fresh burdens should be imposed upon the community. The next Labour Chancellor would introduce proposals which would place at the disposal of the community huge sources of wealth, at present privately appropriated, which could be devoted to the removal of the terrible burden of the national debt and the carrying through of more schemes of social reform.

The resolution was carried by 2,614,000 votes to 437,000.

Col. Wedgwood, M.P., moved the next resolution, which declared the belief that the right solution of the land problem remained the very foundation of Labour's work. It declared that the land of the country should belong to the people, and that, *pending the accomplishment of public ownership*, land values should be subject to taxation in order to reduce the cost of land and minerals in the interests of trade and employment.

The funds for the purchase of the land, added the resolution, should be raised from two principal sources—namely, the taxation of land values, and the revenues received from land already in State ownership. [The italics are ours. We comment on p. 217 on the policy of securing public landownership by purchase.]

He understood the resolution was to be attacked because it involved compensation. But it should be observed that the compensation was to be paid at the landlord's expense. He thought the device was a happy one, because it united the two wings of thought on the subject. It proposed to do away with land ownership exactly as we did away with the licensed houses.

Mr. Vaughan, of Bristol, seconded the resolution. As a builder, he said, he had been bitten so much by landlords, and had had to bite other people in return to such an extent, that he was almost prepared to support the amendment which declared for no compensation. But he appreciated the practical difficulties and therefore heartily supported the resolution.

Mr. Brooksbank, of Norwich, moved, and Mr. Collier, of Holborn, seconded an amendment declaring for nationalization without compensation.

The amendment was defeated.

A further amendment was moved by North Norfolk declaring the land of the country to belong to the people, and asking that immediate steps should be taken to ensure that the holders of land should pay the economic rent of it into the National Exchequer.

The amendment was defeated by 2,481,000 votes to 344,000.

Local Rating

On the motion of Mr. W. H. Hutchinson, Labour candidate for South Bristol, for the Executive, a resolution was adopted demanding that local authorities should be given power to levy rates on land values which had been created by the community, and that larger grants in aid should be paid from the national exchequer towards the cost of services which were of national importance.

In the course of his speech Mr. Hutchinson said:—

We seek to give all local authorities the power, if they chose to use it, to levy a rate on land values and so ease the burden on other ratepayers.

Land values are the creation of the community; they are created and maintained and increased by the ratepayers' money.

Therefore it is *just* to levy rates upon land value, and so recover for the community part of the value created by them.

For instance, the new motor road between Manchester and Liverpool. It starts outside Manchester and ends outside Liverpool and passes through no towns. They are buying the land for the road at £70 an acre, at a cost of over £400,000. When the road is made the frontage will be worth £250 to £300 an acre. The owners profit both ways.

Everyone knows of roads such as this, street-widenings, parks, drainage works, which have created land value. Every increase in population does the same. It is *just* to levy a rate upon such created value, and get something back.

It is also *expedient* to do so:—

(1) Because, having to pay such a rate, landlords will be more anxious to sell, and all land will become cheaper. There will be more in the market.

Most people object to idle building land escaping rates. Rightly so, because it sets a premium on idleness, restricts production and creates unemployment and overcrowding.

(2) Because the present rates upon occupied houses and working factories and pits make houses scarcer and dearer, restrict production by adding to overhead charges, increase prices and so reduce employment. Therefore if we can reduce the present rates by levying rates on land value instead, we help both ways—making both land cheaper and goods cheaper.

LAND-VALUE POLICY

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There are two common Tory objections:—

(1) That the landlord can pass the charge on to the tenant. If that were so, they would not squeal so much about robbery. They know it is not so, so do the economists.

(2) That it would lead to skyscrapers and overcrowding. But anything that makes land less expensive will lead to more land per house, not less. The builder will be able to provide twice as much land per house for the same money.

Eccles Labour Party is against the exemption of machinery from rates. The Party is divided on this question. The rating of machinery adds to the cost of production and consequently injures trade. But if the cost is to be made up by taxing the people's houses still further, Labour naturally kicks. That is why we in this resolution urge that both machinery and houses should be relieved and the rates levied instead upon land value.

In conclusion I notice that Mr. Lloyd George is willing to allow the rating of land values in towns but not in rural areas. It is an illogical position, dictated by fear of the country landlords in his party. You cannot distinguish between urban and rural now when houses and factories are spreading out over the countryside under the influence of motor transport, and in any case local authorities have a right to chose for themselves.

The resolution was adopted.

A correspondent writes: "All amendments moved to the Land Resolution emphasized that land was the key of the labour problem; all the speeches except one were on our side."

"PROGRESS AND POVERTY" IN FRENCH

We welcome the publication at the instance of the Belgian Land Reform League (*Ligue pour la Reform Foncière*, 9, Rue Copernic, Brussels) of the French translation of Henry George's *PROGRESS AND POVERTY*.* Thus the French version is now available in addition to the translations in many languages: Danish-Norwegian by V. Ullman; Danish by Jacob E. Lange; German, three translations by C. D. F. Gütschow, David Haeck and F. Dobbert; Spanish, three translations, one anonymous and the others by Ramon Ibañez and Baldomero Argente; Magyar by Dr. Robert Braun; Swedish by C. Lofving and H. Wennerström; Italian by Ludovico Eusebio; Dutch by Straatman; Finnish by Arvid Järnefelt; Russian by S. Nikolaiew; Chinese by Dr. W. E. Macklin. Extracts have been done into Esperanto and the book has been rendered into the Braille for the blind by John MacTaggart. The French edition mentions also Portuguese, Czech, Japanese and Arabic but with these editions we are not acquainted.

We understand that the original French translation was made by Paul le Monnier and that it has long been out of print. The story is that when le Monnier's translation first appeared in Paris in 1888, it disappeared at once from the bookstalls and from the publishing trade in mysterious fashion, and it looks as if our Belgian co-workers had rescued one of the copies and had this new print made from the original.

The Belgian League are warmly to be congratulated on the form in which they have once more presented

* *PROGRÈS ET PAUVRETÉ*, translated by P. L. le Monnier. Paris, Librairie Félix Alcan, Boulevard St. Germain 108; Brussels, Librairie Vve F. Larcier, Rue des Minimes 26-28. Price 20 francs. Copies may be had from our offices at 5s. each including postage.

George's great work to the French reading public. No pains have been spared to make the volume worthy of its contents with admirable paper and admirable type of that particularly clear kind which is peculiar to the best French productions. We only wish, in the interests of permanence, it had been practicable to provide it with a binding of cloth instead of the paper in which Belgian and French volumes commonly appear.

It is a curious irony that the French, of all people reputedly the most logical and in some respects the most democratic, should for all these years have been deprived of direct access to the most logical and profound of all economic works. Especially is this want remarkable when we remember that the principles on which Henry George builds his philosophy found their first expression, as he himself recognized, in the teachings of the great Frenchmen Quesnay and Turgot. Those teachers with others formed the group known as the Physiocrats who but for the Revolution would certainly have embodied their ideas in the laws of France, such was the impression they produced and the favour with which they were received.

We trust our friends in Brussels will be rewarded for their enterprise by a marked revival of interest in a practical philosophy peculiarly in harmony with the genius of the French and Belgian peoples.

W. R. LESTER.

NEW RAILWAYS AND LAND VALUES The History of Golders Green Repeated at Edgware

(From the *ESTATE GAZETTE*, 5th October)

There is every appearance that the rapid advance of Edgware as a high-class residential district will be just as wonderful as that of Golders Green was after the opening of the Tube railways, and in offering the Broadlands Manor Estate of 24½ acres in Edgware, considered to be the finest available estate at present in the market, Mr. Charles Handman (Messrs. Ernest Owers) said certain events were about to take place which would enormously increase the value of land there. The estate has a prominent position within 600 yards of the Edgware Tube extension, the shops and bus services, has a frontage of 740 ft. to Hale Lane and 1,240 ft. to Broadlands Avenue, whilst a total of 6,345 ft. of building frontage could be created. During the past year there has been an appreciation of 30 to 40 per cent. in local land values, and there is no doubt Edgware is showing real progress and movement and that customers for houses are flocking there. Mr. Handman recounted many facts as to dealings with houses, 30 being sold after four had been covered in; another builder had sold everything he erected and two further estates had been acquired by large developers. Land in the vicinity of Golders Green Station sold at £300 to £500 per acre before the railway came, and was making £3,000 per acre soon after the opening of the line. The same thing may happen at Edgware. In these days of the high cost of construction it pays a builder to give a good price to get the best possible position, and he turns money over quickly for building on land worth £10 per foot frontage. A claim of £3,700 has already been made as compensation for the land on the estate required for the Watford bypass road, and the purchaser would have the benefit of the sum awarded. An attractive farmhouse was included, but the property had to be passed at £34,500.