

LAND & LIBERTY

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NOVEMBER, 1963

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JOURNAL OF THE UNITED
COMMITTEE FOR THE TAXATION
OF LAND VALUES LTD.

177 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London, S.W.1.
VICtoria 4266 & 4979

Annual Subscription:

U.K. and Sterling Area, 8s.

U.S.A. and Canada, \$1

Established
JUNE, 1894

VOL. LXX, No. 834

NOVEMBER, 1963



EDITORIAL

Conservatives In Conference

IT HAS BEEN SUGGESTED in the past that an admirable slogan for the Conservative Party might be "We don't know where we're going, but we're on our way." To a certain extent this might suit all three parties at the moment as far as economic policy is concerned, but it is certainly most apt to describe the impressions formed from reports of the Conservative Party Conference at Blackpool.

While the Labour and Liberal parties at their conferences spent considerable time discussing land speculation and high land costs, and put forward various proposals, the Conservatives had to be content with a statement that legislation to curb speculation is now being drafted and that the conference was not the place to go into the details. Apart from making guesses at the form that this legislation might take, we may be sure that whatever measures are introduced, they will only superficially touch the real problem, as did the misconceived capital gains taxes.

Conservative confusion was rife during the passionate debates on trade and agriculture. The stated problem was to reconcile the claims of other countries, particularly the Commonwealth, with those of the Exchequer, the housewife's purse and the farmer's pocket. The Government's proposals for dealing with these claims would "make possible the composition of a grand design within which private enterprise would have its full opportunity." These words, spoken by Mr. D. P. Sells (Cambridgeshire), suggest that it is possible to examine all interests on their own merits. That there can be only one interest which is truly relevant, the interest of the consumer, is carefully avoided. The agricultural debate was a field day for protectionists, not the least of whom

was Mr. A. W. Wiggin who demanded that the home farmer should be offered "not a part, not a share, but the whole of any expansion of the market."

A plea from Northern Ireland for greater economic assistance was based on an allegation that Ulster had not been receiving her "promised share" of new industry. This conception not only implies that it is the Government's duty to guide industrial development, but that it should allocate a definite proportion of expansion where it is required. On a more sober note, Mr. R. E. Simmerson (Conservative University Association), stated that the Government had to accept a small increase in inflation and a small reduction in the value of the pound if unemployment difficulties were to be overcome — a frank admission of a resort to the printing press, the consequences of which — the stop-go crises of the last decade — we have had bitter experience.

In housing policy, Mr. Butler claimed that it was the Party's intention to put home ownership within the reach of all by spreading the cost "reasonably." The housing programme would be expanded to 400,000 a year and would cater for the many who would prefer to rent a modern home from a housing society without subsidy. As

we know so well, the greatest barrier to cheaper housing is the cost of land: Mr. Butler made no comment on this.

It is interesting to note how Conservatism has changed over the years. Compromises have been made throughout the Party's history; many of them under Mr. Macmillan. It is a pity that a party which claims to retain the best of the old while accepting the inevitability of the new seems completely incapable of looking in front of its own nose. At its worst, in the past, the party reflected minority vested interests. Today it is attempting to pander to the tastes of all by a series of compromises which will hardly deceive even the least discerning. No attempt is made to look for economic truth and face up to it, while every endeavour is made to hide present inconsistencies. While there are differences of opinion within the other two parties (equally illustrated at their conferences), one is tempted to think that they want to go somewhere and might be prepared to tread on a few toes in the process. The Conservatives, however, are neither sure where they are going nor how they are going to get there. It remains to be seen what effect a new Prime Minister and reshuffled Cabinet will have on the Tory outlook.

NOTES AND NEWS

**Plight of the Caravanners — Labour's
Land Commission under fire — Rating
Law absurdities**



GRIM EXAMPLE OF LAND MONOPOLY

THERE ARE MANY REASONS for living in a caravan, particularly while on holiday, but a recent survey* concerned with those who are permanent caravan dwellers, through necessity rather than choice, highlights the economics of "caravanism." According to *The Economist*, July 13, there are now about 100,000 residential caravans, perhaps accommodating a quarter of a million people — no small reflection on the housing situation.

Whether the caravan is hired or purchased by cash payment or credit, the ground rent averages about 25s. a week, although some people may have to pay as much as 50s. weekly. The ground rent often bears little relation to the amenities offered at the site. In some cases sound concrete foundations, flush toilets and communal laundry rooms are provided; elsewhere the site is just a corner of a field. It is not unknown to be asked to pay an advance premium of £30-£40 before entering a site. In exchange for this premium it is possible to obtain security of tenure on a weekly basis, provided that one

is prepared to accept the rules and regulations of the site operator. These regulations range from simple limitations on keeping pets and exhibiting washing to "no children" and "no vegetable gardens." Attempts have been made to restrict residents from purchasing household commodities from other than "approved retailers" who visit the site. Apparently this is quite legal.

Of all the problems of having to live in a caravan, finding a site is the greatest. Some dealers will "offer" to find a suitable site for the purchaser of a new caravan, subject to the usual payment, and occasionally dealers also own and run their own sites. This, of course, is very profitable. A farmer, for example, who gains £50 a year per acre of grain crop could increase his yield to £1,040 per acre by cropping caravans at a modest rent of 20s. a week. Neither are these dividends limited to the usual run of entrepreneurs. Local authorities who run caravan sites can also use the ground rent revenue to advantage. An example is given in this survey of Basingstoke Council, which charges 55s. 2d. a week for a newly-completed two-bedroomed house and 33s. a plot on a caravan site!

The "caravan racket" is one of the clearest examples of sheer exploitation of the present land situation we

*New Society October 10.