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THE GENERAL ELECTION

AFTER NEARLY ten years a general election is to be held to elect a new Parliament of the United Kingdom. The Coalition Government which was formed after the fall of the Chamberlain administration, in the spring of 1940, has been dissolved. Mr. Churchill, as leader of the Conservative Party, has formed a new Government of undisguisedly Tory complexion to carry on until the result of the election is disclosed on July 26.

The tasks which lie before the people of this country are most momentous. The war with Japan is by no means ended. Europe is disorganised; much of its productive equipment is destroyed; and its economic unity disrupted. The same is true of large parts of China, Burma, Malaya and the Philippines. In our own country much damage has been done to houses and other buildings, and facilities for peace-time production have been diverted to the making of munitions of war.

Beyond the economic difficulties there is the political and moral disintegration brought about by the totalitarian regimes. Democracy, even if there were agreement on what that means, cannot be restored by the stroke of a pen. The way in which the peace settlement is framed will be of profound importance to the future peace and happiness of the world.

Most urgent and pressing is the restoration of production for civilian needs. The people of this and other countries have suffered prolonged and severe deprivation in order that labour should be enrolled in the armed forces or directed to the provisioning and maintenance of them. It is by the test of what food, clothing, shelter and other goods they can get that the success or failure of any government will be judged.

This fact is implicitly recognised in the programmes of the three main political parties, yet it is difficult to find in these a logical and consistent exposition of the economic principles upon which a policy of full production should be based. Indeed it is not easy to find a clear dividing line between the three programmes.

The first principle is that production must serve the needs of individuals. Neglect of this fosters the idea that the controls and restrictions imposed for the purposes of war are suited to the purposes of peace. In war the whole effort must be concentrated upon one collective end, and the needs and desires of

the individual must be sacrificed and over-ridden. It may be granted that in the period of transition, and in a world in which there are great disparities of wealth, some forms of rationing must continue for a period. But it should never be forgotten that even in war, the inequality of wealth is the primary reason for rationing. Controls do not alter that fact nor provide a remedy for it.

A free society is one in which the individual can demand and obtain what he wants and not what the State thinks best for him. In such a society the individual must be free to exchange his labour or the products of his labour for that of others. In a world that is to be a unity, at peace, and fully prosperous this right must extend to the citizens of all countries without regard to national frontiers. Now is the opportunity to assert it and to pledge the goodwill and co-operation of this country in a return to a policy of less exclusion and isolation than that pursued since 1931. Now particularly is the time to acknowledge by practical action the encouraging trend towards a lowering of tariff barriers which has manifested itself in the United States. Freedom of trade not only between all the United Nations, but with the Axis powers also, would be a powerful influence in the direction of peace and goodwill between nations. Yet this principle is ignored in the programmes of the Conservative and Labour Parties. It finds a renewed expression in the programme of the Liberal Party in spite of the vacillation shown at its recent party conference. At the same time, however, the Liberal Party approves of the "full employment" policy of Sir William Beveridge although his book virtually throws free trade overboard.

Freedom of exchange is not in itself enough. There must also be freedom to produce. That involves in the first place freedom to make use of the land which is the only and ultimate source of all wealth. Those who own the land must not be allowed to leave it idle or badly used. It must become available to those who are able and willing to use it. This also receives scant attention in the Party programmes. They all make mention of agriculture which is not the major aspect of the land question in a country that must in any event, if it is to be well fed, import large quantities of food stuffs. Yet as regards agriculture the stress is laid upon "stable mar-

kets," or "fair prices and guaranteed markets," in other words subsidies which mean in the end higher prices for agricultural land and more rent for the landlord at the expense of consumer or taxpayer.

The Labour Party's programme does, however, say that "in the interests of agriculture, housing and town and country planning alike we declare for a radical solution for the crippling problems of land acquisition and use in the service of the national plan," and calls for "wider and speedier powers to acquire land for public purposes." The Liberals in dealing with housing declare that the "procedure for the acquisition of land must be expedited and cheapened." In both cases there is no recognition of the fact that the price of land is already inflated to a speculative level by the holding of land out of use. The speedier and more wholesale is the process of public purchase, the more rapidly will the State or the local authorities be loaded up with a burden of debt incurred to pay for speculative values.

Nowhere in these programmes is there any assertion of the right of the community to the land value which the community has created. Nowhere is there any recognition of the unjust burden placed by our existing system of local and national taxation upon the provision of houses and the use of land for all productive purposes. Yet, surely, if we want a remedy for the housing shortage we must abandon the suicidal policy of making houses scarcer and dearer by taxation. If we want our people to have full employment and to be able to produce the maximum of wealth, we must cease taxing the improvements which are made to develop land for productive purposes. The way to achieve these things is to tax the site value of land and to untax the processes and products of industry.

In their woeful disregard of things which should form the foundation of a wise policy all parties are to blame. Thoughtful electors may well feel perplexed. Specious promises will, no doubt, capture many votes, but will or can the promises be carried out if those who make them do not know the first principles upon which policy should be framed? If the promises are not fulfilled, then follows disgust and disillusionment of political methods. So those who profess to fight Fascism, may easily

bring about the conditions which lead to it.

Doles, however grandly they may be dressed up in the name of social security, are not a substitute for justice. Inequality in the distribution of wealth and hindrances to its production are the two primary social evils. Not to palliate the results but to destroy the causes must be the true aim of political endeavour. Let the political parties and the electors give heed to that ere it is too late.

LLOYD GEORGE UNACKNOWLEDGED

THERE WAS significance in the failure of most of the Press obituaries of Lord Lloyd George, who died on March 26, to dwell upon the campaign as a social reformer by which he made his greatest mark on British politics. Most of the writers glossed over the People's Budget of 1909, where they mentioned it at all. They would not allow that the land question played such a notable part in our political history, but following the fashion of the times they turned attention upon the palliative legislation which (to its own undoing) the Liberal Party developed and presented to the Socialists of all brands. They handed bouquets to Lloyd George as the originator of the National Insurance Acts, inferentially praising him for doing what in fact he did—desert the cause of the land for the people. But there were some who made passing reference to that land campaign, which roused the country as it has never been roused before or since. The iniquities of landlordism had been revealed, and with that perception of where the real power lay that held the people in thrall, two General Elections were fought to force the Budget, inept beginning as it was, over the heads of the House of Lords and to pass the Parliament Act which for ever made the House of Commons supreme in our body politic.

Various papers reminded us that the Limehouse speech (and as we read it again how we starve for the statesman who will speak out with the same boldness and truth) provided a synonym for scurrilous invective, the easy reproof and riposte to any righteous indignation. Thus the *Scotsman* spoke of the Lloyd George platform method which "could descend to such excesses as those of Limehouse and Mile End very different from the suavity of manner he had acquired in the House of Commons when (in 1908) he was piloting his Bills as President of the Board of Health. These are amusing apologies for the vehemence of some of the well-remembered attacks on the House of Lords; and the compliment that Lloyd George could be affable—to the Tories—is not out of place, seeing that the measures referred to, coming from the spokesman of a Liberal Government, were the Merchant Shipping Act and the Patents and Designs Act which sowed the seeds of the now luxuriant Protectionist plant.

The memory of Lloyd George was as badly served by Mr. Churchill, who also found discretion in his silence on that Budget Land Campaign and all that it involved. He confined his tribute to Lloyd George's place in domestic politics to "having launched the Liberal and Radical forces in this country into the broad stream of social betterment and social security along which all modern parties now steered"; and Mr. Churchill, doing scant justice to himself, said, "I was his lieutenant in those days and shared in a minor way in the work."

How incomplete and misleading that

HOUSE RENTS — SOME FORGOTTEN ASPECTS

THE ALMOST hopeless muddle in the housing situation is likely to be the priority question in the forthcoming General Election. Absence of skilled labour has been the main excuse. Now that labour will soon be returning from the war it will be the high cost of materials and land that will be seen to be the obstacles to house production. Government departments dilly-dally between one plan and another, between one type of house and another. Good old bricks and mortar are ruled out because of time taken in erection. Steel, aluminium, three-ply, and other materials are being experimented with. If, as a cynic might suggest, we are driven to celluloid and cellophane for dwellings, all these materials come from land, and under present monopoly conditions their cost progressively rises.

Three things enter into the cost of housing:—the price of land, the price of materials, and the heavy taxation of dwellings under our local rating system. A separate aspect, but most important, is the poverty of the people for whom the houses are built.

As to the cost of land, the most recent exposure was in the House of Lords debate when Lord Latham stated that £400 per house (not per acre) has been the average (not exceptional) cost of land for temporary houses to the London County Council. All over the country municipalities find that rising land prices are the initial obstacle to their building programmes. Speculation in land is rampant. The scandal is recognised, but not so the remedy, involving a change in our rating system, by bringing on to the rate books the unused land which is the chief subject of speculation by the owners.

If land for building sites is subject to speculative influences so will be the land from which materials are derived. This is so obvious as not to require labouring. But the third element in the cost of houses to those who dwell in them; is one that is often overlooked as a factor in the problem. This factor is the rates levied on houses. After being practically stationary for some years, local rates all through the country, are now advancing at a speed equalling the rise in land. The

picture is can be gauged by a reading of the speeches Mr. Churchill did make at that time, not on the national insurance scheme of things but on the land question. With a brilliance of oratory exceeding that of his captain he was the good lieutenant in the campaign which he himself inspired with Cobden's words, "You who shall liberate the land will do more for your country than we have done in the liberation of its commerce." But the curtain which he said at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1907 "had been pulled up upon a piece that was going to have a long run" is now drawn over all that.

provision of houses is itself one cause of the rise in rates.

The long-needed education programme, and the threatened cost of such schemes as the national health plan, all help to enhance the cost of local government. In some of our great cities the rates approach the level of 20s. in the £ with the promise of further additions.

The chief burden of the rates falls upon the lowest range of dwellings. This is a point often overlooked. It is assumed that a city's income must come mainly from the big businesses, factories, warehouses, etc. As a fact, from one-half to two-thirds of municipal revenue is derived from property up to £30 per annum assessable value. It is this class of property that constitutes the housing problem, the replacement and increasing of the houses required by the working classes of the people, the class that bears the heaviest proportion of the cost of local government.

Thus we see the housing problem as a vicious circle, and an ever narrowing one. As the total cost of a house rises, a pre-war £300 house now costing £750, and a £500 now costing £1,000, the rates on the house are proportionately higher, and the ability of the people whose need is greatest is more and more inadequate to pay the combined rents and rates of even the poorest type of dwellings or flats. It has been said, as rents get higher, ceilings get lower. The people are to be offered homes that are so sub-standard as to be only tolerable for ten years. The authorities evidently count on the maxim that the patience of the poor is the foundation of society.

There is abundant experience from the pre-war peace years if we could learn from it. Beautiful housing estates were planned and built in many parts of the country, but it was found they did not solve the problem of housing the poor, which is a poverty problem. Just before the war the medical officer of Stockton-on-Tees was saying that the death rate was greater in the new housing estate there, than in the slums from which the tenants came.

Manchester is justly proud of its garden city at Wythenshawe, but the city has not recovered from its surprise when