

## GEORGE SAWYER'S ACHIEVEMENT

YEARS AGO, when Mr. George Francis Sawyer—he once wrote M.P. after his name, and has more years' service on Birmingham City Council than any of the 40 odd members seeking re-election—had to earn his living by taking the night goods train to London, he sat in his guard's van thinking about freeing men by freeing the land.

For 24 years—he has sat for Duddeston and Nechells all that time, has fought 18 elections for the old Board of Guardians, the Council, and Parliament—Free Trade, Free Land and Free Men have been his maxims.

Every time he got up to speak in the Council Chamber colleagues sat back and smiled, reporters dropped their pencils and went out for a cigarette. Everyone expected another speech on taxing the land, and seldom were they wrong.

"Old George," as he was affectionately called in the ante-room, was always greeted with something akin to amused toleration. But if any of his colleagues tried a wisecrack George was equal to it. He got up one day to the call of "Back to the Land." Above the titter came his riposte. "No, the land back to the people."

But whether he was ruled "Out of order," or had to talk mostly to empty benches—"Sawyer's talking about land values again, he's good for 25 minutes; let's have tea now," would flash round the smoke room—he refused to admit defeat.

Years of frustration made Councillor Sawyer the champion strategist of the City Council. He never defied Standing Orders, but he got round them very adroitly. And though it was always the same topic, it was never the same speech twice running. "It's such a big subject," he used to say, "that I can always find something fresh to talk about." But he never got any further until—

Four years ago he got the first reward of persistency. The Council agreed to his plea that the Reconstruction Committee should investigate what effect the rating of land values would have on post-war housing.

And then . . . At the October meeting of the Council, the last of which Mr. Sawyer was a member, till the verdict of the polls decides whether he shall continue to live among the City Fathers, this arch-priest of land value rating saw a resolution go through that representations be made to the Association of Municipal Corporations in favour of rating site values, vacant sites, and empty houses, as alternative, or additional, methods of raising money for local government.

"Even if I am defeated on November 1, I have at least the satisfaction of knowing I've run the race and breasted the tape at last," he told me. But will he be defeated? George is almost an institution in Duddeston.

Land value rating has been the main-spring of all his work since he started preaching the working man's cause as a youth, and was black-listed in his native village in Oxfordshire. He was then an agricultural labourer earning 12s. a week.

"Did you know," he asked me, "that nearly 100 years' war was carried on with France in Edward III's time on money raised from the land alone?"

I didn't . . . Did you?

By "C.M." in the *Birmingham Evening Despatch*, October 22.

## BRITISH TARIFFS 1923-42

MR. DERYCK ABEL in *A History of British Tariffs, 1923-42* (Heath Cranton Ltd., 9s. 6d.) has provided a handbook which should be invaluable to all serious students of our fiscal policy. Its account of how Great Britain abandoned the Free Trade upon which its industrial and commercial success had been built up over eighty years is illuminating. That policy was not merely destroyed by its open foes, but betrayed by many of its professed supporters. What the motives of the latter were can only be surmised. Was it the desire for place and power in the State, or the delusion that good can come out of evil? Certainly nothing but evil followed. Mr. Abel's account might have been strengthened by an indication of the extent to which tariffs were raised in other countries and the disastrous fall in international trade which afflicted the whole world with unemployment and poverty. The arguments in favour of Free Trade remain as clear and unassailable as ever they were, but if they are not kept in the forefront of public discussion new generations arise who know nothing of them and are only too easily deceived by the sophisms of the Protectionists and the appeal to apparent self-interest which has always been their main weapon. This is a book which should be read by every serious student of public affairs.

## LIBERAL LIBERTY LEAGUE

The attention of readers in the London area is drawn, by advertisement in another column, to the Public Meeting which the Liberal Liberty League is holding in the Kingsway Hall, Kingsway, London, on Friday, November 23, at 6.30 p.m. Admission is free. All interested are exhorted to help to make the meeting a success by procuring tickets for distribution and by bill-posting the posters obtainable from the League. The policy declaration of the League *Full Opportunity for Employment* has been widely circulated. The demand for copies has made necessary the printing of a further large supply.

Mr. ASHLEY MITCHELL will preside at the above-mentioned Kingsway Hall meeting and the speakers are Messrs. T. ATHOLL ROBERTSON, GEORGE WINDER, S. W. ALEXANDER and STEPHEN MARTIN.

On November 22, at 7.45 p.m., the Palmers Green Liberal Association holds a public meeting in the Bowes Road Schools, Palmers Green. The speakers are Messrs. T. ATHOLL ROBERTSON (presiding), ASHLEY MITCHELL, and others from the Liberal Liberty League.

## NOTES AND NEWS

New leaflets and reprints issued by the United Committee include *The Burden of Local Taxation*, a 4 pp. quarto manifesto; *Rate Land Values*, a 2 pp. octavo sheet; *Land Value Rating, Cardiff States the Case*, 4pp., 8vo; *The Immediate Necessity for Land Value Rating*, by COUNCILLOR SYDNEY NEEDOFF, B.A., a small 4 pp. pocket folder. These publications are 1d. each or 3s. per 100, post paid. They were in considerable demand. Now that the November elections are over, it does not mean that circulation and distribution of this and other literature should rest. On the contrary, it should be sustained with all possible energy. Every member of local authorities should be canvassed for his or her support, with that Question No. 2 as above especially in mind, since it is from the local authorities themselves, obliged as they are to administer the present most unjust rating system, that the demand must be made upon Parliament to provide the necessary legislation for THE RATING OF LAND VALUES. Earnestly we press upon all our readers this request: that they will help in this campaign by making personal contact with their local Councillors and sending us, for our own postal purposes, lists of names and addresses of Councillors, which should be obtainable from the local municipal offices.

For stimulating publicity and "making the campaign" the United Committee sent a post card to some 3,500 correspondents suggesting that they attend meetings and ask candidates at the Municipal Elections the following questions: 1. Do you agree that the value of land is due to municipal expenditure and to the presence and activities of the community and should be assessed for public revenue? 2. Will you urge your Council to press for the necessary legislation to enable local authorities to rate land values and relieve houses and other buildings from rates? 3. Do you agree that the rating of valuable vacant or underused land at its true value will prevent speculation and encourage the better use of land? 4. Do you agree that the first step in rating reform must be a valuation of all land for the levy of rates upon its true value (exempting buildings) and as a basis for fixing its price when it is acquired?

The Welsh League sent circulars with the Questions as above to altogether 182 candidates in Cardiff, Swansea, Newport, Cowbridge, Abergavenny, and Merthyr Tydfil. Considerable quantities of the United Committee's leaflets were distributed at meetings.

"I am in favour of a ruthless reform of our rating system which presses unfairly upon the poor, encourages land speculation, and adds to land values, which are appropriated by the rich. Both rates and taxes should be levied upon site values as is done in other and more progressive countries, and that buildings and improvements should be wholly exempted, both from rates and State taxes."—From the *Election Address* of FRANCIS R. KING, East Ward, Penzance.

"The existing rating system will have to be radically reformed if ample houses at reasonable rentals are to be forthcoming, and in order to encourage improvements to property. Why should the community have to pay fabulous prices for land which has been made valuable by communal enterprise? Why should a shopkeeper have to pay higher rates for spending his own hard-earned money on improving his frontage? . . .