

## IN THE GRIP OF THE LANDLORDS

What gives the Capitalist his power of economic exploitation? Why is the wage-earner always a wage-slave? Why can the Financier extort exorbitant rates of interest for municipal loans or other enterprise? And the answer is that so long as the Land is locked in private possession you have no alternative but to be exploited, and to become a wage-slave, and to pay whatever interest is demanded. The key to the whole social and economic problem therefore lies in dissolving the Land Monopoly; and until this is righted, all will be wrong.

I know that this connection between the Land Question and economic emancipation is not generally recognised. It is of course not so obvious as tilting at the Capitalist; the Capitalist pays your wages; he exploits "Labour"; therefore he must be the enemy. But it may be better strategy in the long run to cut his communications than to spend all our energy in a frontal attack, and then discover that for the tyranny of Capitalism we have merely substituted the tyranny of Bureaucracy.

Now it is the merit of approaching the social problem through the Land Question that you can at once conserve every fundamental liberty, and at the same time sap the foundations of predatory Capitalism; for—what many Socialists fail to see—Capitalism itself, like everything else in human economy, rests upon the Land. Go back to the question stated above: Why is the wage-earner a wage-slave? What gives the Capitalist his power of economic exploitation? Obviously, because the wage-earner has no alternative? Equally obviously, because the Land is locked against him, so that he is unable to take Nature's direct way of meeting human need by applying his labour to mother earth. If he had this alternative, he could dictate his own terms to the Capitalist; "interest" would not all flow into the shareholders' pockets; it would be evenly distributed among all workers; "Financiers" would not be able to extort high rates for municipal loans, for they would have no monopoly of "capital." Moreover, free the Land from the grip of monopoly, and municipalities would not have to go begging, cap in hand, of the urban or suburban landlords for the modest acres required for housing schemes; the rôles would be reversed; land would be available; building would begin and continue; wages would rise; production would be stimulated, not merely for private profit but for the public good; prices would fall as production increased; wealth would accumulate; the workers, having access to the land, could co-operate in their guilds and societies, and work out their own economic salvation without the bureaucrat. Liberty would be conserved; we should escape the woodenness of State control; with the increase of wealth, there could be increase of leisure, the cultivation of the arts, opportunity for the growth of the soul; the social order could be adapted to human requirements, instead of *vice versa*, as is the case to-day.

This is not a theory remote from the realities of life. Ask the Governor of East Africa, who has recently been complaining of the hard lot of the white planters and stock-breeders in that region. What is the matter? Only this: that the natives have tribal reservations and are content to stay there instead of becoming the wage-slaves of the white man. In other words, they have access to the land; and hence an alternative to the exploitation of private capitalism. . . . The social order is "In the grip of the Landlords." Yet that grip could be loosened to-morrow without any cataclysm by the simple device of a tax on Land Values; impose the tax to-morrow. Then we could begin to rebuild the social structure on its God-given basis. Until we do that we only invite failure and disillusion.—(From an Article in the "Crusader" of 7th May by the Rev. Leyton Richards, M.A.)

## LAND SPECULATION IN CANADA

The SINGLE TAX (Winnipeg), in its May issue contains an able criticism by Mr. D. F. Peddie, of the Report of the Manitoba Tax Commission. Dealing with the suggestion that the Taxation of Land Values in Western Canadian towns had not solved the problem of municipal finance, Mr. Peddie says:—

"What really was the cause of the financial difficulties experienced in the western towns and which were common to those that adhered to the old system, as well as to those that adopted municipal single tax? It is not difficult to find out; the evidences are too plain.

"In the era of land speculators, especially speculators in urban lands that began in 1902 and terminated in 1913, men who had never known what it was to have anything but their wages suddenly found themselves rich through fortunate purchase of land in certain localities. These facts becoming known, and indeed being widely advertised, every one or nearly every one tried the same game. The idea that every one could get rich through the increase of land values was widely prevalent. It did not matter what land was really worth, you could always sell it for more to-morrow than you paid to-day, and so land that had agricultural value was sold as high as \$100 per foot. All this speculation was based on the expectation of getting the economic rent that comes with the growth of population and the development of industry. The real estate fraternity nursed the game along by dangling the golden bait of future riches before the sucker's eyes, and while the speculators ran away with the money, the councils floated loans for the installation of civic improvements which were often in large measure for the purpose of still further boosting land values and making nice pictures in the sub-division ads.

"When the crash came, as come it must to all things not based on intrinsic value, then the people who had paid good money for worthless lots, refused to throw away more good money in paying taxes on them. The municipalities were caught with the overload of debt incurred for improvements. The liabilities of the land speculator being greater than his assets, industry and business had to shoulder his burden as well as their own, a burden vastly augmented by the speculators' activities.

"The assessment and taxation commission would have us believe that the financial difficulties of the municipalities were a punishment justly inflicted on them for having taken some portion of the speculators' gains to defray municipal expenditure. They rejoice with exceeding great joy that the burden has been placed once more where it belongs. They are for having industry pay all the bills. Industry in 'good pay.'

"Had the increase in land values in these municipalities been taxed into the municipal treasuries no debt need have incurred and speculation would have been eliminated. The predicament of the western municipalities is due, not to land value taxation, but to its application not being sufficiently heavy."

The need for local revenue is everywhere growing and rates are approaching, and in some places have already exceeded, 20s. in the £. In many Lancashire towns machinery which had hitherto escaped the assessor is now being included in the assessment. If the rates were levied on the capital value of all land, and houses, mills and machinery were exempted from rates (as is done in Sydney, N.S.W.) the cost of production in the cotton, building, and other industries would be reduced by more than the amount of the rates remitted.—Arthur H. Weller, in the "Manchester City News," May 22nd.