

LIBERAL LIBERTY LEAGUE

A LARGE gathering attended the meeting in St. Ermin's, Westminster, on 15th January, in response to the invitations which had been issued, to inaugurate the Liberal Liberty League. Very many had been prevented by the extremely inclement weather. More than 100 had sent messages of greeting, unable to come because of other engagements or because they lived so far from London. Extracts from these letters had been sent to everyone who had intimated intention to join the League; they were circulated at the meeting, and their cumulative sentiment of approval and determination to work for the success of the League made a considerable impression. There was also posted to everyone, and circulated at the meeting, a four-page printed leaflet with "Statements on Liberal Policy" on Land Value Taxation and Free Trade, equal opportunity and economic freedom—the principles in fact to which the Liberal Party is pledged—quoting among others the declarations of the Anti-Corn Law League, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, Winston Churchill, Richard Cobden, John Stuart Mill, Lord Oxford and Asquith, Sir Robert Peel, Professor Lionel Roberts, Adam Smith and Alexander Ure, Lord Strathclyde.

Mr. Ashley Mitchell, who presided, explained the reasons for calling the League into being, with its programme "Free Trade, Free Land, Free Men." On the motion of Mr. S. Martin, seconded by Mr. Douglas Moore, it was unanimously resolved to constitute the League, and resolutions were adopted appointing the officers as follows: Chairman, Mr. Ashley Mitchell; Vice-Chairman, Mr. T. Atholl Robertson; Hon. Treasurer, Mr. Wilfrid Harrison; Joint Hon. Secretaries, Messrs. Chas. H. Batty, Frank Dupuis and S. Martin; Executive Committee, Messrs. W. E. Bland and L. G. Bowman, Mrs. Ann L. Brown, Messrs. R. C. Clarke, H. Edgcombe, C. A. Gardner, G. G. Honeuman, D. L. Layzell, D. M. Lough, Douglas Moore, Councillor S. Needoff, J. H. Palmer, P. Roche, Frank Sykes, G. H. Winder and W. C. Woodroffe. It was further resolved to constitute a General Council from all the subscribing members who had joined to date. The membership fee was fixed at a minimum of 5s. yearly, additional financial support being invited from members and others by way of free-will donations for promoting the work.

In the course of the discussions on these motions and other matters, including a decision to apply for affiliation with the Liberal Party Organisation, very many took part.

In his preliminary statement, Mr. Mitchell said that for several years earnest Liberals had seen the Liberal Party drifting away from the old militant policy that had put principles first; up to 1914 these principles embodied the freeing of the individual from the oppression of privilege and monopoly and they were expressed without fear or favour. Since then they had seen

these principles forgotten or whittled down and displaced by responsible people speaking for the Party, until at the latest Liberal Assembly in 1943 the process was carried so far that the resulting policy became almost unrecognisable as a Liberal programme to Liberals like themselves. Collectivism and State-control were elevated to first place. The old Free Trade gospel was made a mere distant aim, and we were only to see British tariffs reduced by international bargaining, "handing the key of the Citadel to the Protectionists," as had been stated in the League's announcement. Even worse, former Liberal declarations demanding Land Value Taxation had been nullified by approval of the Uthwatt proposals, which by land purchase would endow the land monopoly at the public expense. Those who lamented and rightly the terrible state of the world to-day should be made aware that they were themselves responsible for such conditions, because they had wilfully ignored the greatest economic discovery of the last century. Many men had seen the importance of the land question, but the American, Henry George, was the first economist who showed the relation of the law of rent to the law of wages; that is to say, so long as the owners of the earth were allowed to take the cream of all the value of invention and social progress, so long would the remuneration of labour and capital be held down to mere existence levels. Equality of opportunity needed freedom, and this country more than any other required Free Trade for its very existence; but Free Trade was far more than freedom of exchange; it was but a partial thing if not accompanied by the freedom of production. Great promises of a better state were being held out to the people: food, work, homes and abolition of want. Which was most likely to be right? A few super-men planning with the best intentions but basing their schemes on a system of taxation that robbed the people of their earnings, made every employer an amateur tax collector, put a tax on the giving of employment which piled up snowball-fashion to an additional purchase tax, and maintained tariff restrictions that prevented trade from expanding; or the way they offered which was offered by no one else, namely, to carry out the true meaning of *laissez faire, laissez aller*, remove all obstacles and let things be done. In other words, let the natives of Great Britain have access to the land of Britain; they would soon build their own homes, produce their food and exchange their products for the abundance of other lands.

Mr. T. Atholl Robertson, ex-M.P., said they were now preparing themselves for a propaganda within the party which was badly needed. They had to attack and destroy the land monopoly which was the greatest monopoly of all, and that would make it far easier to deal with the lesser monopolies. They

wanted to see a self-reliant people with the widest possible freedom to develop all the ability God had given them; not merely Free Trade, but to make a four-square freedom of Free Land and Free Trade. How senseless it would be to begin by buying up all undeveloped land, wasting our finance as we did with mineral rights; how right it was for us not to take from a man that which he has produced by his hand or his brain, but for our revenue to go to that great pool of values which the community created and take it for community needs.

Mr. Wilfrid Harrison (Hendon) said that in some of the pamphlets that had been issued for the Liberal Assembly, frequent reference was made to works by Mr. Geoffrey Crowther, the Editor of the *Economist*. The present Liberal leaders seemed to derive their ideas from this source. Mr. Crowther had borrowed the theory of Lord Keynes that the fluctuations of the trade cycle could be flattened out by monetary manipulation in an expansionist direction, thereby providing steady work for all. There were people in the Liberal Party who believed that the Taxation of Land Values, by breaking the land monopoly and forcing land into its best use, would eliminate what has become known as the "Unemployment Problem." The Economist school of thought did not accept that teaching. They based their reasoning upon most incomplete statistics. Although land was half the factors in wealth production and economic rent was a main channel of distribution, all statistics relating to the capital and annual values of land were completely missing from their information. These statisticians had no information whatever about the relationship of economic rent to wages, yet their advice upon Finance, Banking and Trade was sought and accepted by the Liberal leaders. The advice was as incompetent as it was faulty. Thanking the meeting for the honour done him by appointment to the treasurer'ship, he appealed to all who were with them to assist him in his duties and to realise how necessary it was to have financial support.

Among others who spoke, each in spirited fashion and all very much to the point, were Mr. Frank Sykes (Peterborough), Councillor C. H. Willcock (Yorkshire), Mr. Douglas Moore (Sheffield), Mr. H. Donald Moore (Manchester), Mr. Kenneth Macdonald (Glasgow), and Messrs. C. H. Batty (Hendon), E. C. Chancellor (Kent), F. Dupuis (Sudbury), H. Edgcombe (Wimbledon), G. G. Honeuman (London), S. Martin (Chislehurst), J. H. Palmer (Fulham), A. St. Clair Penny (London), G. H. Winder (E. Grinstead), and W. C. Woodroffe (Walthamstow).

Subsequently the Executive Committee met and made arrangements for office accommodation, which has now been rented at 4 Great Smith Street, Westminster, London, S.W. 1. All communications should be addressed to the Hon. Secretaries (or to the Hon. Treasurer), the Liberal Liberty League, at that address.