

FARMING IN SOUTH AFRICA

By F. A. W. Lucas, K.C., in the "Free People," Johannesburg, 19th April.

HIGH LAND prices benefit no one but the men who, though calling themselves farmers, are primarily land speculators. Tenants and bywoners can obviously gain nothing from rising land prices. In fact, they suffer grievously as a result of the rise. Instances have recently been quoted in Parliament of farm rents having been raised 300 per cent. since the war began. If a tenant is to survive such an imposition he must get higher prices or exhaust the soil. In the one case the rising rent sends up the cost of living, in the other it is helping to turn our country into a desert so that our children will not be able to live in it. Then, too, rising land prices, while enriching some without their working, make it difficult for many and impossible for more to start farming. So much money has to be found for buying land that there is nothing left for making improvements and buying equipment.

In 1931 Parliament passed an Act the object of which was to prohibit the importation of wheat at a price of less than 22s. 6d. a bag. Without such interference with free importation it could have been landed at Durban for about half that price. The effect of the Act was to stimulate the production of wheat on poor land. The price of wheat land soared, that of good land being doubled. This meant that the owners were able to sell to those who wanted to become wheat farmers the value of the Act of Parliament, and these persons were not allowed to be wheat farmers until they, in effect, bought that Act. The farmer landowners grew rich without working because of the Act. The price of wheat rose in consequence, and within four years the wheat farmers were clamouring for a subsidy to enable them to produce wheat at the new high prices. Only the landowners scored. The farmers and the consumers suffered.

In the case of wool the price paid in recent years for sheep farms has been so high that interest at 5 per cent. on the purchase price represents 3d. to 4d. a pound, or nearly one-third of the price paid to the producer.

What the land monopolist gets without working must be made good by somebody's effort. He does not pick his unearned riches out of the air. But actually this robbery of the workers is not the most damaging feature of the injustice. If the workers were free to work without hindrance they could produce so much wealth that the amount of which they are now being robbed might seem relatively small. The great injury lies in the fact that the land monopolist gets rich because of his power to hold land out of use, that is, by causing unemployment. It is the price he can charge for giving permission to work that makes him rich. Because that price is high, we are prevented from working as builders or miners or farmers. That keeps wages low, and the prices of houses,

metals and minerals and farm produce are made unduly high.

We can have work for all and food, clothing and shelter for all, only if we destroy land monopoly with the power it gives to a few to grow rich without working. We must take the profit out of land holding as distinct from land using and see that everyone gets the full product of his work.

HOUSES OF THE FUTURE

By A. C. Wilkinson, Chartered Surveyor, in the "Liverpool Daily Post," 19th June.

Basically, the problem of improved domestic amenities is an economic one; in other words it rests upon the relationship between the cost of providing a given house and that proportion of the occupier's wages available for rent.

Within the overall cost of a house, the separate costs of the site and the actual building may be widely variable; the higher the cost of land, the less the money available for the house itself. How this aspect devolves in practice may be seen upon consideration of the costs *per acre* which Liverpool Corporation has had to pay for land for housing and recreational purposes in a few local schemes, viz.: Norris Green Estate, £154; Allerton estate, £267; Harthill estate, £615; Elm House estate £756; Otterspool and Jericho estate, £2,937; St. Edward's College estate, £6,800. One does not need be a mathematician to see that it is becoming impossible to provide on a self-supporting basis anything but a bare minimum of accommodation, where the cost of land per dwelling is so high.

It is land speculation which forces up the price of building land so as to exclude on financial grounds the provision of many desirable and necessary improvements in the houses themselves, and the non-provision of these should not, in fairness, be laid at the door of designers and planners.

I make the point, therefore, that until the evil of artificial land prices can be overcome, most of the suggestions for the improvement of houses will be impossible of attainment. The shifting of the basis of taxation to land values would force into the market, at reasonable prices, much idle building land now held out of use (and virtually untaxed) awaiting high speculative prices. The money thus saved would then be available to local authorities and private builders alike, to be put into the houses themselves, and thus facilitate an improved standard of housing commensurate with modern technical, scientific and artistic progress.

The subsidising of house-building would appear to be no solution to the problem. Under subsidy schemes, I suggest we act in a most irrational fashion, when, at one and the same time, we subsidise the provision of houses from the rates and taxes while we maintain a system of rating and taxation which raises the price of dwellings and progressively diminishes the ability of the people to pay for them.

LIBERAL LIBERTY LEAGUE

The Executive of the League met on 15th June and adopted two resolutions. One expressed concern at the protectionist sentiments uttered from the Conservative and Labour benches in Parliament during the debate on Empire and Commonwealth unity, and demanded a return to Free Trade and the abolition of all hindrances to the free exchange of goods and services.

During the discussion it was suggested that we call on the Prime Minister and the President of the United States to revise Article IV. of the Atlantic Charter by deleting the words "with due respect to existing obligations" so that the avowed principle of "equal access to the trade and to the raw materials of the world" is unquestionable.

The other resolution expressed grave disquiet with the action of the Conservative and Labour majority on the Speaker's Conference in rejecting proportional representation, and that no attempt had been made to remedy a system which permitted minority Party government, and demanded a just system of representation whereby democratic government became a reality.

At the invitation of the London Liberal Party it was agreed to co-operate in a series of meetings to be organised by them in the London Area.

Area meetings in London will be held on Saturday afternoons on 23rd and 30th September.

A Sub-Committee is to draw up a manifesto for circulation at the Liberal Assembly when it meets. Joint meetings with other Free Trade organisations was also agreed.

The Manchester Exchange Liberal Association are submitting an amendment supporting rating of land values to the Liberal Assembly, proposed by Councillor Needoff and seconded by Mr. H. D. Moore, the newly-adopted Liberal candidate for Moss Side.

Among recent recruits to the League, a refugee from Spain sends the League a donation and writes: "You may feel happy you can work in furthering the natural aim of man to be free. I feel sure you will understand how near to you in heart is he who lost his freedom just fighting to be free."

Mr. G. L. Tossell, a Liberal candidate in the 1935 election, now in the forces, writes: "The attainment of those ideals which I have always understood were an integral part of Liberalism—the only way to clearly convince the general public that there is an unbridgable gulf of belief between the Socialists and Conservatives and ourselves—is to attack their political platforms. I take it your new organisation is not going to be mealy mouthed in regard to those principles which, from the Mid-Lothian campaign, have been honourable to the Liberal Party."

Mr. Edward Gallop writes: "I am pleased that you have taken up so strongly the matter of Free Trade and the taxation of land values. It is high time that our Party woke up to the fact that it is only by a bold policy of what we believe to be right that we can hope to gain the ear of the man and woman in the street."

Members are urged to make known the activities of the League among their friends on constituency Liberal Associations, and by this means help in the crusade for Free Land, Free Trade and Free Men. Press Secretary, Liberal Party League, 4, Great Smith Street, S.W. 1.

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