

LIBERALS AND LAND REFORM

The *Evening Argus*, Hastings, 28th April, reported extensively an interview with Alderman Arthur Blackman J.P., ex-Mayor of Hastings and former Liberal candidate for the Borough. Land reform, Alderman Blackman said, has been one of the foremost planks in the Liberal platform. It was the land values clauses in the 1909 Budget that was chiefly responsible for provoking the challenge of the House of Lords which ended with the passing of the Parliament Act. "Post-war reconstruction makes it more than ever imperative that legislation should be passed to break the monopoly that has fastened its tentacles more tightly on the community with every passing year." Asked why he was so insistent upon taxing land values in preference to other subjects, Alderman Blackman said: "Land is the mother of us all and it is the source of all wealth. Labour is the father. Combined, these two factors are responsible for everything necessary for the maintenance of life. Land is as necessary to mankind as the air we breathe or the sun that shines. All goods that are manufactured can be replaced as and when required, whereas any abuse of the land is wealth lost to the community and can never be replaced. Whenever a town throws out its suburbs into the neighbouring country, whenever public improvements are carried out either by public authorities or by private enterprise—as when a new road or a new tube railway is built—the value of the land in the neighbourhood goes up by leaps and bounds, and the added value goes to the owners of the land who have done nothing to earn it. It is mainly in this way that the values in land have been created. If this 'unearned' wealth which is created by the community could be impounded, in whole or in part, for the service of the community, it would pay all or most of the cost of the improvements to which it is due, and so immensely reduce the burden of other taxes.

"If a man, through negligence, leaves his land idle, or if he wilfully keeps it out of use in the hope of extorting a monopoly price, he is rated little, if at all. If, on the other hand he puts it to good use such as building houses or factories upon it, or in other words acting as a good citizen, he is fined in the measure of his improvement. Under this system, as will be apparent, enterprise, is penalized and industry handicapped, amid a crying need for houses a fine is levied upon houses erected, and slums are positively encouraged.

"There should be a national tax upon the real site value, and rating should be assessed accordingly. This is a kind of wealth which is peculiarly suited for taxation, and which can be taxed without the least injustice. Moreover the taxation of it would encourage the owners of the land not to hold it up for a rise but to develop it, which would therefore make it easier and cheaper to acquire land for productive purposes. Here can be found a very great alleviation of the burdens that now weigh so crushingly upon productive industry."

Asked to explain why present conditions had been allowed to continue, Alderman Blackman said: "British Government have hitherto been chary of interfering in

this sphere because of the immense influence of the land-owning class. But you will agree that it is intolerable that any small class should be able to hold the community to ransom by its control of this fundamental necessity, or even to prevent the land from being fully and advantageously used. It should be the duty of the State to ensure that in the use of land, public and not private interests should always be supreme."

Speaking at Middlesbrough on 17th April (*Liberal Magazine* report), Mr Harcourt Johnstone, M.P., Secretary to the Department of Overseas Trade, said: "The greatest of all monopolies—land—is a monopoly not in the sense that it is all owned by one person or organization, but because its quantity is permanently fixed. The artificially high price of land adds to our costs in every direction. It adds to the price of housing and therefore to the level of rent; and rent is an important feature in the level of wages. It adds to the cost of manufacture and of transport; and until land is taxed and rated this will continue. I am convinced that the rating and taxation of land values would have an excellent effect upon the economy of the country.

Speaking at the conference on "Planning for Living" called by the Town and Country Planning Association at Tunbridge Wells on 3rd April, Mr S. Martin, representing Chislehurst Division Liberal Council, said the ideals of town and country planning were in line with the general ideas of the great majority of the people, but since every improvement had meant an increase in the burden of taxation, he suggested they ought to attempt to obtain an equitable system of taxation before they began to plan for ideal living conditions.

The land was the source of all wealth, and therefore the true basis of taxation and rating, and he suggested that until they tackled that problem planning would only complicate and add further burdens to the taxpayer. The site valuation of all land as a basis of rating and taxation should be the first step of the Government in post-war legislation.—*Kentish Times* report.

CAUSE AND CURE

The following is extract from a letter sent by Mr E. J. McManus to a large number of weekly newspapers which has been widely published with the result that the writer has had numerous requests for the information he offers.

Sir,—In the leading article of the 5th December, 1940, *The Times* asserted that the seven millions unemployed in Germany in 1933 "brought Hitler to power." The consequences of unemployment to the unemployed, and also to those whose occupational security it gravely menaces, make the prevention of it in the post-war period the question of supreme political importance. . . . Mistaking the cause of unemployment, many people assume, incorrectly, that its cure depends upon, or requires money; either the governmental expenditure of money or schemes for "making work," or the compulsory transfer of money from some producers to other producers.

But, despite the philanthropic intentions of its supporters, the Beveridge plan can effect no real change in social conditions. It turns the minds of men away from seeking the root cause of unemployment, and means the return, but on a more elaborate scale, to the pre-war tinkering with its effects. Its extension of the unjust device of "feeding the dog with its own tail," by direct and veiled indirect taxation will tend to reduce the social condition of those who command relatively high returns for their mental or physical exertion to the level of those whom social injustice compels to accept low wages.

Yet, broadcasting on the 19th February, 1935, Sir William Beveridge wanted the cause of unemployment found and removed. Then, he urged "economists, government, employers and trades' unions" to "take stock frankly of the facts of unemployment," to "find the ace" that would remove its cause and "to play it before the game is over," as "there may be no last resort in which to play it before we feel its full and catastrophic effects."

I submitted to him "the ace" discoverable by Political Economy when scientifically pursued—subsequently printed in a monthly. It would encroach unduly on your valuable space to discuss "the ace" in this letter, but I will send a copy of the article, post free, to your readers who request it.—Yours, etc.,

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(The communication referred to which Mr McManus sent to Sir William Beveridge was published in the April, 1935, issue of *Land & Liberty*. Typescript copies of this have been made and may be had on application.)

CITIZEN OF THE WORLD

A New Biography of Henry George
by Anna George de Mille

AN ENTHUSIASTIC welcome awaits the biography of her father, which Mrs de Mille has written with the title *Citizen of the World, Study of a Personality*. It will be a book of about 350 pages. It is being prepared for publication in America. We look forward eagerly to learning when it will be available for circulation and sale. Meanwhile, it is appearing in instalments in the *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, published quarterly under grant from the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation 32 East 29th Street, New York City. The fourth instalment, January 1943, brings the story to that stage in the Californian period which introduced *Progress and Poverty* to the world. It is a captivating story; the appetite is whetted for more. "In this work," the *Journal* says, "presented in narrative form to maintain interest, Mrs de Mille makes available to later students family and other materials that were not available to Henry George, Jr., who for more than four decades has remained George's standard biographer. The work also incorporates some of the results of Mrs de Mille's years of study of these materials and of those used by Henry George, Jr."