

THE LLOYD GEORGE LAND ENQUIRY

REBUFF FROM SCOTTISH LIBERALS

Taxation of Land Values Demanded

A public demonstration under the auspices of the Scottish Liberal Federation was addressed by Mr. Lloyd George in Inverness on 9th October. The occasion was the Annual Conference of the Federation which, when it proceeded to business, promptly condemned Mr. Lloyd George's new policy in regard to the land question and declared emphatically for the taxation of land values. Mr. Lloyd George himself was not present at these discussions. He made a public speech in Inverness and passed on at once to other towns to continue his campaign—and as to that Inverness speech, the *HIGHLAND NEWS* (17th October) makes a comment that anyone present will fully endorse:—

“He avoided going into the scheme in detail in case its weakness should become more and more apparent. His hearers came there from far and near in order to hear his famous land scheme expounded letter by letter, clause by clause. With patience characteristic of a Scottish audience, they listened and waited for an exposition of the speaker's views. Down to the end of his speech they hoped against hope that sooner or later he would satisfy the hunger they had come so far to allay, but platter after platter was handed round empty. Sauce there was in plenty and table decoration, but this was all; and a beautiful peroration, sentimental, commonplace enough, ended one of the most disappointing meetings ever held within the precincts of the town of Inverness. Once installed within the burgh, the delegates and Mr. Lloyd George, leader of the party, separated. Both came to Inverness to make the people wise on the Liberal policy generally, and the Liberal land policy particularly. What happened? While Mr. Lloyd George was half-heartedly and in travail endeavouring to promulgate the Liberal land policy in the Riding School building, the Liberal delegates, in the Dr. Black Memorial Hall, were denouncing the said Liberal land policy. The visit of Liberal delegates to Inverness, dragging with them their nominal leader, to hold him up and denounce him as a failure, was a sight for the gods which will long be remembered by the people, whatever their politics, of the Highlands.”

MR. FALCONER'S CRITICISM

At the meeting of the Conference on 9th October Mr. James Falconer, ex-M.P. for Forfarshire, referred to the summary of the Land Enquiry Committee's proposals that had appeared in the papers, and said he regretted Mr. Lloyd George was not present as he (Mr. Falconer) wanted to say quite frankly to his face that there were features of that scheme which in his opinion were unsound, and, so far as Scotland was concerned, absolutely hopeless.

Dealing first with the clause stating “that the landlords of the country should be bought out on their present net rental,” he declared, was a gigantic proposition, as any farmer would tell them that at the present time rents were far in excess of the economic value of the land. How unsound, then, it was to suggest that the State, at this time of financial difficulty and stress, should embark on the purchase of all the land of the country on the basis of the existing net rental.

When the landlord was bought out, he was to cease to have any responsibility to the tenant. That was a serious matter, as the farm buildings periodically

required restoration. Was the State to take on that work? At the present time, the tenant needed all his money for working capital, but as a result of these proposals either of two things would happen. Either it would be impossible for the tenant to get the money for renewing the buildings, or else the burden would fall on the State if it was to get the rent.

As to the suggestion that “the tenant was to have his tenure on the basis of a fixed rental”—the same rental as that which would be obtained for compensating the landlords—they had to bear in mind that the capacity of the farmers to pay rent varied with the cost of production. Supposing they had three or four bad years, they would have farmers unable to pay rent. Then they would have wholesale evictions, or a rent strike, because there was not sufficient elasticity between landlord and tenant by means of which bad times could be tided over. If they got the length of the rent strike, they would have all the worst evils of the land situation.

Who, Mr. Falconer asked, was going to administer and manage such a landed estate? After the experience of the late war, nobody would suggest that that was a task that any Government should be entrusted with, so instead they found that there was to be created a county agricultural authority. Who, however, would suggest that in Scotland the farmers would tolerate having their conduct supervised, or would allow themselves to be judged by a county agricultural authority, most of whom, probably, would know nothing about agriculture, while others would have no business experience? Behind all this screen they would find that the real controlling influence would be the old Board of Agriculture, which everybody desired to see superseded. Government control, such as was suggested, seemed to him to condemn the scheme.

The Conference passed unanimously Mr. Falconer's resolution in favour of security of tenure for farmers that have not more than one holding, full compensation for all permanent improvements, freedom of cropping, fair rents and control of heather burning.

TAXATION OF LAND VALUES

At the morning session on 10th October, the Conference considered resolutions submitted by the Glasgow, the Maryhill and the Inverness Liberal Associations in terms of which

The Conference reaffirmed the declaration of the Scottish Liberal Federation that “Scottish Liberalism is pledged to the policy of rating and taxing unimproved land value on its capital basis, whether used or held out of use; holds with increasing conviction that this reform offers the only way out of our vexatious problems of industrial and commercial depression, with its concomitant misery of unemployment and poverty; and further declares that no treatment of the land question inconsistent with the above, or which does not place the above as the prime factor, will have the support of Scottish Liberalism.”

Moving the resolution, Mr. George Young, J.P., Inverness, said this was a question that had occupied the attention of Inverness Town Council on repeated occasions in connection with ratepayers' meetings, and they had agreed that the principle of taxation of Land Values should be put into force. He could quote many instances where the Corporation of Inverness had to pay large sums in order to get land to carry out improvements. If the Corporation had to do that for the benefit

of the community, the superior of the lands should have to pay something in taxation.

Mr. Isaac Mackenzie, Inverness, seconding, said that taxation of Land Values was the most important policy in front of the country now. It was time that the Liberal Party, both the leaders and the rank and file, took it up in earnest. If they wanted to get on firm ground again they must adopt that policy or perish. He did not see any earnestness on the part of the leaders. The previous night Mr. Lloyd George never once, from the beginning to the end of his speech, made reference to the taxation of Land Values.

Sir Henry Ballantyne, speaking in support, said he had not been a member of a Commission on Housing without knowing something about the land question in Scotland. They all knew the extravagant prices that had to be paid for land in their cities and towns, and they knew that, owing to their present system of rating, the landowner who got twenty times more a year than he got before in the way of feu duties did not even pay the rates he did before when it was agricultural land, but shifted the whole of them on to the individual feuar or the community. They talked about housing. That was one of the causes why they could not get houses as they would like to get them. They talked about unemployment. Let them free the land so that men could employ themselves. There was surely enough land in Scotland to give employment to all the unemployed in the country.

If the Liberal leaders in 1909 had gone straight for the Taxation of Land Values, he did not believe that the Liberal Party would have been in the present position. They had allowed the Labour Party to steal most of their programme. He did not think they quite agreed amongst themselves yet about the Taxation of Land Values, but once they were, Labour would steal that too.

It was a very dangerous thing to preach anything in the nature of nationalization or Government interference with the individual, and he was afraid that Mr. Lloyd George's coal and power and land programmes were tending in that direction. If they thought by advocating policies of that kind they were to get back some of their best Radicals who had been driven out—very largely, he believed, because of the failure of the Liberal Party on the Taxation of Land Values—he thought they would find themselves bitterly mistaken.

Mr. J. Deas, Glasgow, said one of the main reasons for the decline of Liberalism in Scotland was the failure of the leaders to follow the lead given by the Scottish Liberal Federation. And Mr. Lloyd George was the chief offender. It was his surrender to landlordism in 1909 that was the chief cause.

Mr. Wm. Reid, Glasgow, emphasized the importance of land value taxation as applying without any artificial distinctions both to "rural" and to "urban" land, and explained how Denmark had successfully made a valuation of the land apart from improvements, had imposed a universal and uniform though small tax on land values, and was now taking up local taxation of land value in both town and country.

The resolution was unanimously adopted.

LAND VALUE TAXATION IN PRACTICE

The Story of New South Wales
and Sydney

By ALDERMAN J. R. FIRTH
12pp. Price One Penny

From our Offices.

A WARNING TO THE LABOUR PARTY

By E. ROSSLYN MITCHELL, M.P.

(Extract from article appearing in FORWARD, Glasgow,
17th October)

The Whirlwind Campaign

Newspapers tell us that Mr. Lloyd George has had a "whirlwind campaign" and a "lightning campaign" in Scotland. It has done just what whirlwinds and lightning generally do, caused much disturbance and excitement. It has not swept away landlordism or royalties or deer forests, or thrown much light on land-hunger and Highland depopulation. It has revealed nothing as to the why of glens that once maintained a hundred families being inhabited by two gamekeepers and a shepherd. It has told us nothing of the why of industrial and mercantile depression through high rents, high interest, and high rates. There is not in all Mr. Lloyd George's Inverness speech one suggestion that will help one man to farm an acre of land. Surely everyone knows now about clearances, about alien deer-stalkers, about lost common lands, about crofts and farms going back to heather and bracken, about emigrations to America, and migrations to Glasgow. These things happened and happen still, not because there is no land. The land is there, where it always was, and none can shift it. But it is no longer available for cultivation, because some of Mr. Lloyd George's war-time friends, being war-rich, will pay more for a season of grouse and deer than farmers can pay for ten times the acreage and as much for the privilege of fishing as the rent of 200 acres.

The Great Land Robbery

The very rich want land, not for its produce, but for their pleasure. Villages that once were peopled by men possessing common rights in land are now composed of landless labourers. The people's stake in the soil of their birth has been snatched from them by men who corrupted the powers of the State and denuded the land of its healthy children. Look at England! In the early 19th century when the French Revolution was solidifying into the French Empire, nearly 3,000 separate Acts of Parliament were rushed through by corruption unprecedented, to give the English landlords six million acres of the common lands of the English yeomen—leaving them serfs and paupers. They crowded into towns or were deported for poaching or fled to America for land. Scotland's story is much the same, but without the Acts of Parliament. What help does Mr. Lloyd George offer to the descendants of the robbed? What suggestion has Mr. Lloyd George to offer to those already in the cities who find the results of their energy and enterprise squeezed from them by owners of land, the value of which they and their fellow-citizens have made? Not one word. This land campaign may have some success as a vote-catcher. It can have none as a scheme of land-reform. Probably to its promoter the latter is a minor consideration. But if it has success even as a vote-catcher, it will be, not because of its own merits but because no other Party has had the inclination or courage to face the problem.

Back to the Land

The Conservatives are naturally very well pleased with things as they are, constantly increasing Government subsidies to maintain rent, freedom from local rates, under-valuation for death duties and the social prestige that still clings to landownership. Liberals are in desperation to recreate the influence which they