

## THE NORTHERN AREAS CONVENTION

In Manchester, 26th November, 1938

THE *Manchester Guardian* carried an informing account of the Conference held on 26th November in the Houldsworth Hall, Manchester, reporting several of the speeches at good length. It was the Conference organized by the Manchester Land Values League in conjunction with the Land Values Group of the Parliamentary Labour Party. A large number of delegates attended, representing political, co-operative, trades union, peace and other organizations from the Manchester area and from places as far distant as Chesterfield, Clitheroe, Crewe, Derby, Doncaster, Liverpool, Southport, Stoke-on-Trent and Warrington. Two sessions were held, afternoon and evening.

The three resolutions submitted, text of which was given in our previous issue, were carried unanimously.

In the unavoidable absence of Mr R. R. Stokes, M.P., and of Mr D. R. Grenfell, M.P., the Rt Hon Josiah C. Wedgwood, M.P., kindly consented to address the afternoon meeting, at which chairmanship was shared by Mr H. G. McGhee, M.P., and Alderman G. F. Titt.

Mr Wedgwood, moving the resolution urging legislation for the rating of land values, said: At present our local rates were especially devised to prevent development, expansion, building and improvement, and tradesmen were "punished" for making improvements by the raising of the assessment. Every bit of idle land, he contended, corresponded to a number of compulsorily idle men, whose unemployment drove down the wages of those lucky enough to have work. Land value everywhere was an exact reflection of the benefits conferred by the community on the owner. This land question was at the root of the unemployment and poverty problems, and this simple method of changing the system of rating would bring down the monopoly of land and allow people to work.

Councillor Wm. Johnston, until recently Chairman of the Finance Committee of the Manchester City Council and Deputy-Chairman of the Rating Committee, seconding the resolution, said he thought he could say with some confidence that every member of a local authority—certainly every member of the Finance Committee—was dissatisfied with our present rating system, which did not put the greater burden on the broadest back. He gave illustrations of increase of land values in Manchester and described as the "classical case" the buying of part of an estate at Wythenshawe in 1927 at £80 per acre. There was considerable opposition in the Council to the purchase, but since then they had secured Parliamentary powers to buy the remainder, and the Corporation was now buying certain sections "as they went along," but were paying not £80, but £200 per acre.

Mr Machin (Thorne) said that if the Labour movement would concentrate more attention on this question he was certain they would go forward more quickly in giving the social services a "fair deal."

The resolution declaring tariffs and trade restrictions to be unsound and unjust and urging the Government to call a World Conference to consider the Van Zeeland Report and the removal of all barriers to international trade was moved by Mr H. G. McGhee, M.P., who supported it in an able speech, dwelling not only on the economic injury of customs and indirect taxation to our own people and their social conditions, but also on free and unhampered trade as the road to permanent peace and goodwill among the nations. The resolution was

seconded by Mr Charles Royle, prospective Labour candidate for West Salford.

At the evening session Dr Percy McDougal presided. The resolution declaring unemployment, low wages and trade depression to be the results of land monopoly and repressive taxation and urging land values taxation for national purposes was moved by Mr Andrew MacLaren, M.P., seconded by Mr A. W. Madsen.

Mr MacLaren, in the course of his speech, demonstrated the basic relationship between the employment question and the freeing of land from monopoly, together with the abolition of taxes on production and trade. The resolution, he said, demanded the taxation of land values applied to all land (always by the measure of its value apart from buildings and improvements); there must be no such exemption as was given under the 1931 Finance Act excluding agricultural land. All agricultural land was de-rated to-day, but was commanding enormous prices from the corporations when they wished to expand for housing. If ever there was a time when agricultural land should be included in a national tax on its site value it was now, when contiguous landowners were amassing fortunes with every new road made.

Mr Madsen illustrated, by the provisions in the Bill being promoted by the London County Council, how the rate or the tax on land values would be levied and collected so that each person interested in the value of the land would contribute in proportion to his interest.

Many delegates took part in the discussion following the submission of the resolutions. They had come to confer and they took ample advantage of this Saturday afternoon and evening to do so.

The League appreciates the assistance given by friends in donations for the Conference as well as the response to the appeal on behalf of the collection box, which have helped so much to defray the expenses. That is an aspect of the success of the gathering not to be overlooked. The literature stall was well patronized. The whole stock in hand of *Progress and Poverty* and of the new book *Why Rents and Rates are High* was sold out; and delegates took away with them, paying the price, very many of the penny pamphlets.

### IPSWICH

Congratulations to Mr Anthony Stokes, who was elected (along with Mr A. Victor Smith, the Deputy-Mayor) member of the Ipswich Town Council at the recent municipal elections.

*Forward*, the Municipal Election Number of the local Labour party, gave first place to the special article by the Member for the Borough, Mr R. R. Stokes, M.P., who urged the taxation and rating of land values as the solution of the poverty problem.

In the course of his statement in *Forward* amplifying his election address to the ratepayers, Mr Anthony Stokes said: "as long as local taxation is arranged as at present, so that improvements are met with extra rates and speculators are encouraged by de-rating to hold valuable land out of proper use, development must be cramped and excessive prices paid directly or indirectly by the community for vacant or insufficiently developed properties. This must reduce employment be discouraging enterprise; and the result is that the demand for goods falls and with it the trade and prosperity of everyone regardless of class or position."