

LAND & LIBERTY

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MANIFESTO TO THE ELECTORS

(Issued by the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values)

The persistence of poverty amid increase of wealth is the abiding problem which no other issue of domestic or international politics must be allowed to obscure.

The policies pursued by the National Government, whatever their avowed objects, have had the effect of concentrating wealth still further in the hands of the few.

LAND VALUATION DESTROYED

Almost its first act was to suspend the Land Valuation, and subsequently it repealed the Land Value Tax enacted by its predecessors. Thus those who hold the land were allowed fresh licence to appropriate values created by social progress and public expenditure.

When the land valuation under the 1931 Finance Act was suspended the specious excuse was given that the country could not afford the expenditure on making the valuation, since when large sums have been spent in collecting tariff taxes and millions of public money have been poured out enriching a few at the expense of the many. When the land value tax provisions were repealed in 1934, Mr Ramsay MacDonald, then Prime Minister, gave the real reason for what was a flagrant breach of faith, publicly admitting, "It may be argued that the step which has been taken indicates the power of certain interests." By its own confession, therefore, this Government, calling itself National, is but the tool of the vested interest of landlordism.

RATING REFORM FRUSTRATED

The stoppage of the Land Valuation frustrated the hope held out by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1931 that this Valuation would be made a basis for local taxation. The London County Council and other local authorities roundly condemned the National Government for its action. The system of local taxation can only be reformed by legislation—its inequity is a vital issue. The present system has completely broken down. Municipalities large and small are on the doorsteps of the Exchequer for ever-increasing subventions to meet the cost of poor relief and unemployment, evils that are largely created by the rating system itself. They are compelled to throw the burden on all housing and industrial developments and are not permitted to tap the vast fund of publicly-created values existing in their midst. The subventions they ask for cannot relieve the situation.

In the first place, so far as subventions reduce rates, they assist landlords to obtain higher rents; in the second place, the taxes now levied to provide the subventions (and indirect taxation has grown to £356,000,000) largely fall back on the working population in higher prices of foodstuffs and other commodities.

NO HOPE FOR THE UNEMPLOYED

The present head of the Government, Mr Baldwin, opening the Election campaign, said, and not for the first time: "I am not going to make any promise that I will cure unemployment. You would despise me if I did, because you know that such a promise is incapable of fulfilment." Such a promise is indeed incapable of fulfilment by a Government which refuses to touch the causes of the trouble. Yet, while unemployed men are in want and those very men have the skill and strength to produce the goods needed to satisfy their wants, it is ludicrous to assert that unemployment cannot be cured. But given the safeguarding of land monopoly, given a system of taxation that protects and endows it, given the interference with trade and commerce, given in fact all the policies for which this Government stands, unemployment can only grow worse.

The Government has fastened the pernicious policy of Protection upon the country, not only in the form of tariffs but also in the more deadly forms of quotas, restrictions and marketing schemes, all creating monopolies for favoured interests. It has followed a deliberate and shameless policy of restricting supplies for the purpose of raising prices. The grossest example of this has been in regard to agriculture, where £40,000,000 a year is being taken from the people for subsidies and exemptions from taxation. The consumer has borne the brunt, and the temporary benefit to the farmers has been quickly swallowed up by increased rents or prices for land. Again the surrender to "certain interests" is revealed.

FAILURE OF PROTECTION

The abandonment of Free Trade has been followed by a general raising of customs barriers throughout the world. The promise that tariffs could be used to reduce the tariffs of other countries has been falsified, as it always must be. The Ottawa agreements, now so dramatically repudiated by the people of Canada, and the attempt to make the British Empire a circle closed to foreign trade,

have embittered relations with other countries. The economic policy pursued by the Government must bear a large part of the blame for the worsening of the international situation.

Poverty amid the possibility of plenty challenges the whole foundations of society. Invention, science, improvements in industrial technique, making possible abundance for all, are being frustrated by that monopoly which controls the earth from which all wealth must come.

HIGHER RENTS—LOWER WAGES

Social progress is registering itself in higher and higher prices for land, for without land none can enjoy the advantages which come from an organized community. And so the distribution of wealth is perverted, more and more going to the few in return for permission to use the land, while the rest suffer insecurity and low wages.

The case for the reversal of the policies pursued by the Government is overwhelming. The obstacles to the free exchange of goods and services must be removed. The obstacles in the way of the employment of labour and the production of wealth arising from land monopoly must be broken down.

ITALY NEEDS LAND? HERE IT IS!

(From an article by "Historian" in the "Railway Review," 4th October.)

"Italy"—so runs the widespread and most effective argument of Mussolini's propaganda—"is overpopulated; it has no room for its growing surplus population. From this pressure of population develops a natural urge to expansion, which in all fairness must be met."

The Italians require land. Admitted.

They seek a country in which they can secure soil on which to settle? Very well, there is a country in which plenty of room can be made available for the closely-crowded Italians. Where is this country? It is—Italy.

And here are the proofs, which have the advantage of being derived from official Roman sources.

The authoritative Fascist *Annuario Statistico* for the year 1935 published the official Roman statistics concerning the distribution of the soil in Italy.

According to this, 2,478,412 Italians possess altogether 15,084,452 hectares of cultivated land.

Thirty per cent of this surface (namely, 4,622,880 hectares) belong to 93·1 per cent of those Italians who get a living in agriculture (*i.e.*, 2,314,374 small-holders own between 0·5 and 10 hectares of land).

Another 25 per cent of the cultivated surface (namely, 3,411,081 hectares) belong to a further 6·3 per cent of the agricultural producers (*i.e.*, 151,548 Italians are proprietors of medium-sized farms between 10 and 100 hectares).

But 12,490 Italians (0·6 per cent of the agrarian population) possess the remaining 7,049,682 hectares; therefore, 47 per cent of the cultivated land in Italy (large landed estates of over 100 hectares).

These 12,490 Italians possess as much land as all the other 2,465,822 Italian agrarian producers put together.

A radical land reform would provide living room for millions of Italian peasants—in Italy.

The equal rights of all citizens to the bounty of nature must be established.

LAND VALUES SOCIALLY CREATED

The fundamental and essential step which must be taken is to secure for the community the value attaching to land because of the presence and activities of the community. The practical and simple means of achieving this is the Taxation and Rating of Land Values.

By that means the price of land can be reduced, the holding of land out of use and men out of employment prevented, and the opportunities of earning a livelihood thrown open to all. By that means the revenue to carry on national and municipal services can be provided without raising the prices of commodities and stealing the earnings of labour. By that means tariff barriers can be thrown down and restrictions upon the import of the world's abundance abolished.

By that means the peoples of the world may be made equal sharers in natural resources, and rightful claims to "expansion" satisfied without interference with the freedom of any people, without aggression, without infringement of the autonomy of any nation.

Millions of Italians who, once they have freed their native soil from parasitic idlers, could live happily, peacefully and industriously at home, are to manure Abyssinian soil with their blood.

Will the "objective" defenders of Mussolini's campaign of conquest not change their standpoint in face of these plain-speaking facts?

Moreover, Mussolini's "settlement" argument, in the case of Abyssinia, is in itself mendacious. There is no one who knows Abyssinia who will dispute that the climate and the nature of the soil in Abyssinia makes this country extremely unsuitable for colonization by Europeans. And if even in the south of their own land, in an incomparably more favourable climate, the Italians are certainly not accustomed to extracting imposing yields from the soil, is it seriously intended that these same Italians are to colonize and cultivate murderous Abyssinia in masses?

No, for Mussolini it is not a question of settling land-hungry Italian peasants on Abyssinian soil, but only one of an adventurous attempt to build up a mighty "Imperium Romanum." The adventure is not motivated by a colonizing, but by a militaristic imperialist conception.

Malthus's pessimistic theory of population has long ago, and for ever, been refuted. If anyone wants to learn the truth let him inquire of the engineers and agronomists.

Hunger is not due to lack of room or lack of production, but is simply the result of a distribution of productive resources which has become irrational.

The Italians need land? Admitted!

But in Abyssinia there is no room for hungry Italians. There is in Italy, however, still room for millions of them. Only there must first be scrapped in Italy a system which secures gigantic ground rents for 12,490 idlers. Such a change would certainly cost less bloodshed than one single day of an Abyssinian war.