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## LAND & LIBERTY

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### THE NATION'S NEED

*Pre-Election Manifesto issued by the United Committee  
for the Taxation of Land Values.*

There is little to distinguish in the programmes and policies of the various parties. The Conservatives have much to say about the Planned Economy and the controls and restrictions, how the Government has kept industry in a strait jacket, how it has piled up taxation to meet extravagant expenditures, and how faultily the nationalised industries are operating. But the Conservatives themselves have their Planned Economy. They would retain many nationalised industries, while the controls and restrictions contained in the protective tariffs, which they uphold, are as vicious as a form of Socialism as anything they now condemn. Pre-war Conservative legislation in favour of tariffs and marketing boards, establishing monopolies and granting privileges, paved the way for to-day's Socialism.

The Liberals would seek power to institute a scheme of compulsory co-ownership, an arbitrary and injurious interference with business undertakings (and fatuous as a wage-raising idea), which deprives the party of its title to its very name.

Labour, Conservative and Liberal parties vie with one another in supporting policies of guaranteed prices and guaranteed markets for farm produce, the financial effect of which will be but to guarantee the mounting prices of farm lands, exempted as they are (with both Conservative and Labour approval) from any local taxation, no matter how valuable the land is. Agriculture is not served thereby. No one can now enter that industry without saddling himself with heavy mortgage debt.

The Labour Party is now solid for Customs tariffs as equipment necessary for its controlled economy. Its surrender to territorial landlordism is complete. It continues its inflationary policy of laying out vast sums of public money in land purchase schemes. The price payable for agricultural land must always be the full market value, by which all the largesse thrown at the farmers falls ultimately into the owners' laps. The Conservatives have worked hand in hand with this fraudulent Socialism for the preservation of landlord privilege. But it is surprising that the Liberal Party has fallen for this protectionist policy for agriculture, a reversion to the hated Corn Laws and repudiation of the freedom of trade.

Consider the similarity of outlook on the fundamental problems of persisting poverty, recurring unemployment and low wages. By their policies each of the parties in fact accepts these problems as insoluble. Each regards them as inevitable features of modern society, to be ameliorated but not removed. Nothing more can be done, it is falsely assumed, than to collect aids for the needy, as by insurance contributions, and to supplement wages and give grants to industries out of the proceeds of general taxation. It is not observed that taxation, as it is levied to-day penalising production and trade, is the main cause of the conditions it is sought to amend.

There is something offensive as well as humiliating in what goes by the name of Social Services. They include housing subsidies, guaranteed markets, doles and aids to other industries, not to speak of the "social service" of price-raising protective tariffs which the manufacturers enjoy. The Welfare State, so-called, and so widely distributive, becomes a grand charity, with its gifts to the beneficiaries, most of them not knowing and caring less by what means and with what retroactive effect the pot is filled out of which they eat. That the gifts are illusory and somehow fail of their purpose is proved by the constant pressure for more. See for example how insatiably the farmers lobby at the doorstep of the Treasury for more and more aid, Act after Act voting public funds for their benefit. See how all these aids are never enough, and how they escape as through a sieve, but not at all mysteriously, into the hands of that "superior interest" who has just so much more security for the rent that is his to collect.

Successive Labour budgets have re-enacted the protective tariffs, reimposed every nuisance tax impeding production or hampering trade, or have invented more of the like; have maintained the levies on wages and have placed such burdens on buildings, plant, machinery and stock-in-trade as to make ruinous inroads upon the capital necessary for the running of industry. All that amount of taxation has proved insufficient to meet expenditures. Nor have the American loan, Marshall Aid, the grants and loans from Canada, Australia and other Dominions made good the difference. Even before re-armament began, the increase in internal debt, the use of the printing press and the depreciation of the pound were taking us fast on the road to financial calamity.

The duty of a reform government should be to repeal the spate of pernicious measures introduced by two Labour Governments and to disband the Ministries and Boards which those Acts called into being. First to go should be the Town and Country Planning Act, with its ransom of £300,000,000 to land speculation, its many hundreds of millions more of public funds pledged for land purchase and its development charges so levied as, in fact, to hamstring development. The Agriculture Act must be rescinded. Its aid to farmers, its overall control and its land purchase provisions have not only made small-holdings a dead letter but has established a closed shop for all who are privileged to remain within the industry. The Local Government Act has confirmed and indeed aggravated the inequitable incidence of the

present rating system. The New Towns Act looks not to why old towns are congested and deteriorate but would gamble £25,000,000 more or less on each to-be-built town and then let the rating system do its worst in taxing houses and giving private interests scope to gather increased land values to themselves.

A whole series of other measures touching the land question tells the same story of public money or Marshall Aid, or what you will, entering the Treasury to be dispensed again on schemes which ultimately benefit those who hold the land: the support for hill farmers; the £20,000,000 spent to improve Scotland's water supplies (increasing the rates on houses); the Drainage, Special Roads, Coast Protection and other betterment schemes. Each measure has compelled harassed taxpayers and ratepayers to foot a bill which should be charged against the rents of the benefited lands.

The obliquity of the Labour Government has been its failure to re-enact the Finance Act of 1931 (which the Conservatives repealed); to secure the valuation and taxation of land values and at the same time reform local taxation.

We do not say that the Conservatives would have done any better if they had been in power, but they could hardly have done worse. As it is, Conservatives and Socialists have been closely associated in effecting mischievous land legislation, and the Liberals have not been unwilling companions. It was time all came out into the open to justify their claims to represent the people in the government of the country. Whatever the results may be, we shall not this time have the Government so ardently desired by lovers of liberty, whose practical politics embody the simple plan that the free market shall be restored, that government take its hand off industry and that private initiative be allowed free scope, free from all monopoly and privilege. It is the pathway to peace and prosperity, to the Rule of Law and the righteousness that exalteth a nation. Land Value Taxation, the abolition of taxation on the work of man's hands, the freedom of trade, are secular phrases, but they are contained in the social philosophy free men must live up to, and these are its instruments.

## A BIOGRAPHY WITH FALSE EMPHASIS

In *The Last of the Radicals*\* Miss C. V. Wedgwood, the writer and broadcaster, has presented the life of her uncle in such an urbane manner that she wins the approbation of those who had, and presumably still have, no sympathy with his social philosophy. Maurice Ashley, reviewing this book in *The Listener*, says that although he formerly laughed at Lord Wedgwood's "panacea of making the world safe for democracy by simplifying—or complicating—the procedure of the Inland Revenue" such thoughts did not predominate after reading this narrative; the author "had not allowed herself to be bogged down in the causes for which Lord Wedgwood fought." Such famous books as Condorcet's *Turgot* and Morley's *Gladstone* evidently require drastic excision.

From Miss Wedgwood's account it is quite clear that her uncle at the outset of his political career accepted the doctrines of Henry George and remained firm in this conviction to the end of his life. But if the reader wishes to learn the basis and scope of this radical philosophy which inspired the bulk of the story he will find, apart from passing references, only three sentences (pp. 69-70) which attempt any formal explanation of what the author refers to earlier (p. 10) as "Georgian socialism, now submerged by the Marxian school." After such cursory or misleading information it is not surprising to find that Sir Desmond MacCarthy, writing on this book in *The Sunday Times*, supposes George's "remedy was to nationalise the land" by a method apparently applicable only to America at that time, and which had never occurred to any reformer before. A biography that can leave readers under such delusions regarding the subject's guiding principle cannot do him justice. The Single Tax is not Socialism, as generally understood, but the alternative; it was advocated in old and new communities before George wrote *Progress and Poverty* and is maintained by a vigorous body of adherents not in the slightest affected by the influence of Marx. Miss Wedgwood convinces us of her uncle's integrity, independence and courage, and the vigour with which he

strove for what he considered right. But the biography of a reformer of society cannot have real value if the author does not give readers ample opportunity to judge the value of the reform he advocated, setting forth the arguments on both sides and endeavouring to establish the truth. By dismissing the main principle of her uncle's public life so briefly—even with a trace of amusement, e.g., "the gospel according to Henry George"—readers are left with the impression of a man of outstanding character whose "failure" might be attributed to inexplicable obsession for an obscure and doubtful theory.

Josiah Clement Wedgwood (1872-1943), was a great-great-grandson of that Josiah Wedgwood who in 1759 established the pottery which still flourishes under his lineal descendants. Young Josiah had the advantages of a healthy Victorian home, a public school and foreign travel as preparation for the army career he desired. Failing in physical tests, however, he chose naval architecture and as an apprentice in a Newcastle shipyard developed an enduring fellow-feeling for labouring men which stimulated an already active hatred of any form of oppression. In those days Fabians were the minority, so to stand by the under-dogs Wedgwood turned Fabian. This determined the direction of his approach to social questions although, paradoxically, even in the beginning he set a high value on tradition and nourished a romantic ideal of patriotism which survived service as an artillery captain in the Boer War. Afterwards, as magistrate at Ermelo, in the Transvaal, he was so successful in the task of restoring the life of a war-stricken district and reconciling an enemy whom he admired that he decided to live in Africa. But, his wife's health failing after two years, he resigned and at thirty-two was back in Newcastle-under-Lyme with a family and no profession.

Fortunately, just before this impasse in his career, the bequest of an uncle had assured him an independent income. He interested himself in the public affairs of the locality—his name and family opening every door—and read *Progress and Poverty*, discussing it with a brother on whose advice he had at Ermelo levied a rate

\* Jonathan Cape, London. 16s.