

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE TAXATION OF LAND VALUES

Held in Edinburgh, 28th October



CHAS. E. CROMPTON, Chairman of the Conference

Under the auspices of the United Committee, the Scottish League and the Edinburgh League a NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE TAXATION OF LAND VALUES was held on Saturday, 28th October, at 3 p.m., in the Free Masons' Hall, George Street, Edinburgh.

The following Resolution was unanimously adopted :—

This Conference is of opinion that the value of land apart from improvements is a fund that belongs of right to the community and is the proper source of public revenues ; affirms that taxation and rates levied on the true market value of land, in substitution for the obstructive and burdensome taxes now imposed on industry, would open unlimited avenues to steady employment in both town and country, raise wages, promote the freedom of production, and solve the housing problem ; is convinced that these claims are upheld by the experience of other countries where even a small measure of this policy is in practical operation ; and welcomes the demands made in favour of the Taxation and Rating of Land Values in the official programmes of both Liberal and Labour Parties, in the resolutions of numerous Municipalities and other Local Rating Authorities, and in the repeated declarations of the Trades Union Congress, Trades Councils, Co-operative Societies and many kindred bodies standing for social and economic reform.

Mr. Charles E. Crompton (Carlisle) presided. The Resolution was moved by Ex-Bailie Peter Burt, J.P. (Glasgow), and seconded by Councillor Philip McDevitt (Clydebank). The proceedings at the Conference were reported in the GLASGOW HERALD, the SCOTSMAN, the DAILY RECORD and MAIL, the EDINBURGH EVENING NEWS, the EVENING DISPATCH, the ABERDEEN DAILY JOURNAL and other Scottish papers.

The Hall was well filled, and among the bodies that sent delegates were the Town Councils of Glasgow, Inverness, Airdrie, Clydebank and Newport, the Parish Councils of Govan, Camprie, Bothwell, Livingstone, New and Old Monkland and Dalziel ; the Trades Councils of Glasgow

and Montrose ; the Scottish Home Rule Association ; the Young Scots Society ; and numerous local Labour Parties, Liberal Associations, Trades Unions, Co-operative Societies, Women's Guilds, and other organizations from such centres as Rutherglen, Cambuslang, Blantyre, Motherwell, Dunfermline, Roslin, Tranent, Stirling, Burntisland, Peebles, Galashiels, Falkirk, Alloa, Thornton, and Tillicoultry. Many representative advocates of Land Value Taxation were present from England.

Apologies for inability to be present were received from Mr. P. Wilson Raffan ; Mr. Graham, M.P. ; Mr. C. E. Price ; Mr. H. S. Murray ; Mr. A. W. Metcalfe (Belfast) ; Sir D. M. Stevenson (Glasgow) ; Sir Henry Ballantyne (Haddington) ; Mr. Fred Harper (Cheltenham) ; Mr. Harry Bland (of Melbourne) ; Mr. A. Mackie Niven (of Johannesburg) ; Prof. Steggall (Dundee) ; Mr. M. Mackenzie (Ayr) and others. Expressions of regret that the appointment of delegates was not possible, but wishing success to the Conference, were received from the Parish Councils of Denny and Galashiels and the Union of Post Office Workers at Lochmaddy.

Mr. Raffan (whose place as seconder of the Resolution was taken by Mr. McDevitt) wrote : " I am more sorry than I can say that I shall be unable to be with you. The meeting for my formal adoption as candidate for Ayr Burghs has been fixed for the same afternoon ; and I am bound to be there to acknowledge the confidence reposed in me and take counsel with those who are to co-operate in the struggle. Your Conference meets at an opportune time. In all the welter and confusion of Party politics, there is need for a clear call to the people to keep their minds firmly fixed on those great social questions which concern them most—and especially on the questions of housing and unemployment. As we believe, the solution of both these problems is to be found in a policy which will restore to the people their God-given rights in the land and remove the obstacles to free production which the present system of rating and taxation involves."

International greetings were conveyed from Messrs. Johan Hansson, of Sweden ; H. Berthelsen ; Abel Brink and P. Larsen, of Denmark ; Dr. Schrameier (German Land Reformers), Berlin ; Karl Schewe, of Berlin ; Bolton Hall, of New York ; W. A. Black, of Texas ; B. Haughey, of Denver, Colorado ; L. M. Burrell, of Lyons ; " Teristo," of Moscow ; and Bujan Botuscharoff, of Phillipople, in behalf of the " Fund Henry George " in Bulgaria. The last-named, in the course of his letter, wrote : " We shall attend your Conference in spirit, and we send you our fraternal salutation. We avail ourselves of this occasion to say that we long for an International Association for the Taxation of Land Values, and we wish to suggest your laying the foundation of it. Let its slogan be ' Land and Liberty.' We believe the injustice of the present social order can and shall be removed only by the reform Henry George proposes. Let your good work be directed by the truth the Prophet of San Francisco has proclaimed and let his inspiration warm your hearts."

THE CHAIRMAN, after welcoming the delegates, said the whole political world was in the melting pot, and they found political thought divided into practically four camps. He did not think anyone could foretell what was going to happen as the result of the General Election. But he felt it was a most opportune time for them to get back to first principles and consider what was wrong with civilization and what was necessary to restore peace and happiness to the civilized world. The movement for the Taxation of Land Values had nothing to do with any political party. The movement was simply out to inculcate a principle which would be a guide for politicians and statesmen if they cared to consider the proposals put forward. The proposal was to take the economic rent of land and pay it into a communal fund and use that fund for the remission of all other rates and taxes and

pay for the communal services. Speaking of the advantages claimed, he pointed out that owners of land would be compelled to put their land to use in order to make their contribution to this common fund. The tax or rate on land would bring idle land into use and increase employment, and the increased production of goods would tend to reduce prices. If they could get Taxation of Land Values they would have decent houses and a population earning wages who could afford to live in them, and the slum problem would solve itself by no one going to live in the slums.

EX-BAILIE PETER BURT, J.P., moved the resolution. He said it was astonishing to think that we had discovered wireless telegraphy, wireless telephony and other wonders of science almost impossible to comprehend and still the problem of the unequal distribution of wealth, with its consequences in poverty, unemployment, evil housing conditions and grievous taxation appeared to be beyond the power of politicians to solve. They had in the Taxation of Land Values a very simple and just way out of their economic difficulties. The resolution he submitted spoke for itself. There was no doubt that land value was a common fund since it was by its very definition the value that was due to the position of the land apart from any expenditure of capital or labour on any piece of land. A tax on land values would injure no one who was adequately using his land; but it would make the withholding of land so unprofitable that that wrong in society would cease to be. The opportunities to production would be freed from monopoly. That was the chance industry wanted and there would be the further stimulus that no taxation would be levied on any man's enterprise. They welcomed the fact that their reform had a prominent place in the political platforms of the day and was supported by many municipalities and bodies like the Trade Union Congress. But that was not nearly enough. Their Conference was intended to turn sympathetic sentiment into real effective action and he hoped it would help to organize effort on these lines.

COUNCILLOR McDEVITT, seconding the Resolution, said politically he did not care two pins who assumed the Premiership or who went into power, provided he was an honest man willing to face the circumstances as he found them, and willing to accept such a solution as the removal of the burdens upon industry to the source which was qualified to bear such a burden. The one outstanding feature of their proposals was the universality of their acceptance. Wherever he went, in whatever political circles he moved, he found a readiness to agree with the fundamentals of the proposals they made. The Churches were arraying their forces on the side of this propaganda; municipalities, faced with the ever-increasing burden of local rating, were turning their eyes towards this proposal to transfer to site values the burden of rating from buildings, improvements, and machinery.

MR. CHARLES H. SMITHSON (Halifax) pointed out the difference between the case of an improving landowner, who would be benefited by the Taxation of Land Values, and the monopolist who held idle acres for a rise in value. He gave several telling examples from his own experience as a landowner, and as one who felt the weight of taxation on his improvements.

A general discussion followed, in which many took part. A delegate representing the Society for Equal Citizenship asked if a tax upon land values would not amount to confiscation of the property of the landowning classes.

The Chairman replied that they could call it confiscation of the property of the landowning classes, but his view was that the owner of land was given or had got hold of the power of confiscating the wealth produced by the working classes of this country. (Applause.) All they proposed to do by the taxing of land values was to stop that confiscation which was going on to-day. (Applause.)

COUNCILLOR MUIR, Glasgow, referred to the case of the

working colony at Palacerigg, where what was moss land was now producing food. He said they wished to extend that work, and contingent to it there was moss land which was producing nothing. Labour could produce wealth upon that land, but they were denied the right because the owner wanted for it £50 an acre. (A Voice—"Shame.") If they taxed him on his £50 an acre they would force him to let go the land and allow labour to be employed upon it. (Applause.)

COUNCILLOR P. H. ALLAN, Liberal Candidate for North Edinburgh in the Parliamentary Election, said in connection with Edinburgh Corporation schemes they were going to enhance the value of land for the landowners, and the Corporation would not get one penny for it. They should keep the question in the forefront and make it a live plank in the coming election.

After other discussion and questions, the Resolution was put and declared carried unanimously.

Evening Session

The delegates and members of the Conference adjourned for tea, served in the Lower Hall at 5.30. Business was resumed in the large Hall where the afternoon session had been held, and about 200 persons were present. There was further discussion of the points raised in the afternoon. The subject of housing and land settlement was dealt with in a brief address by Mr. A. W. Madsen, who gave numerous instances to show how recent attempts to improve conditions under the Housing and Small Holdings Acts had not only broken down but had actually done great harm and made things worse than ever. Every house built under the subsidy scheme and every small holding established at a loss had prevented the building of ten more houses and the settling of ten more smallholders. On his motion the following resolution was carried unanimously, and proceedings closed with a vote of thanks to the Chairman.

This Conference unhesitatingly condemns the housing and land settlement policy of the late Government, designed as it was on land purchase and subsidies at the expense of the taxpayer, and affirms that there is no solution of the problem apart from the Taxation and Rating of Land Values.

OTHER CONFERENCE MEETINGS

Friday, 27th October

Mr. W. R. Lester, M.A., presided at a meeting held in the Oak Room of the Princes Street Station Hotel, on Friday, 27th October, at 8 p.m., at which a large number of members and friends of the Edinburgh League, and many of the delegates who had come to attend the National Conference, were present. Mr. Harry Bland (of Melbourne) had been named to give an address on "Land Value Taxation in Practice in Australia," but was unfortunately unable to attend. His place was taken by Messrs. A. W. Madsen and A. Davis, who spoke on the Progress of the Movement in the Dominions and Abroad. Mr. Madsen dealt specially with the local taxation of land values and the position reached by legislation in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, West Australia, New Zealand, the Transvaal, the Cape Province, Kenya Colony, Western Canada and Pittsburg, U.S.A. He described how these countries and communities had taken different steps towards the same goal. In some places, as in Victoria and New Zealand, the local adoption of land value rating was purely optional; in other places, as in New South Wales and the Transvaal, it was compulsory to some degree with an option to levy more or all the rates on land values; in other places, as in Queensland, local authorities were obliged by Parliament to levy all rates on land values and were not permitted to tax improvements. Reviewing the results of the practical adoption of their reform the speaker said that the Resolution to be submitted the next day at the Conference was absolutely justified in stating that the claims