

From the archives

Capital makes gain

In 1939 Herbert Morrison, Home Secretary in World War II, creator of London's 'greenbelt', and Peter Mandelson's grandfather, initiated legislation for a tax to fund London's development. This is his statement

"I BEG TO move that leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for the rating of the annual site value of land in the administrative county of London; and for purposes connected therewith.

I am asking the House to be good enough to permit me to bring in the Bill in order to modify the rating system obtaining in the Administrative County of London. As things are now, the whole of the rates payable to the local authorities in London are raised from the occupiers, namely, the ordinary citizens, the residents, the shopkeepers and the business undertakings. They carry the whole burden of London rates. The purpose of the Bill is to relieve the burden that general body of rate payers carries. The one class in the community who, as such, bear no rate burden at all, are the owners of the land. Landowners, as such, are paying nothing whatever towards the cost of local government, and yet there is no section of the community which benefits more from the existence of the community and the work of the local authorities than the landowning class, particularly in the Administrative County of London. The value of land in London would be negligible if the population of London did not exist. That, I understand, is agreed on both sides of the House. If there were no population in London to work, if the area were depopulated, or agricultural, the value of the land would be either nil or negligible.

The value that attaches to London land attaches to it because a community of millions

of people is at work in the City, and the landowners are living upon the backs of these people. The community itself, the millions of people in London, could not live in this great City if the local authorities did not discharge many statutory duties and conduct many public services. Unless the local authorities existed and worked, the community could not live a civilised existence in London, and, therefore, the value of the land would not exist. In these circumstances it is not only grossly unjust, but it is really a piece of characteristic landowning impudence that these landowners who benefit so much from the existence of the community and from the work of the local authorities, should be specifically exempted from contributing their share towards the work of the local authorities. I am bound to say that if I were the Duke of Bedford I would have had too much sense of shame to have

Changing times: a wringer for the modern home' advertised in a 1939 edition of Land&Liberty

petitioned against the Bill on this subject which was recently submitted to Parliament. The general body of ratepayers, including the little shopkeepers, the business men, the lower middle class, the owner-occupier who is purchasing his house under a loan from a local authority or building society – all this body of ratepayers are paying more rates in order that landowners shall pay no rates; and we say that it is unjust, and that it is the duty of the House to give justice to this general body of ratepayers...."

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debate on land value
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The Scottish Parliamentary
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20 February
Conference

Culture and Regeneration

Hong Kong Theatre, London
Speaker: Chris Smith MP

Free admission - no
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www.lse.ac.uk/events

11 March
Conference

Planning and Transport
Strategies for London
and the South East: Do
They Fit Together?

London Marriott Hotel
www.thewaterfront.co.uk
has details

21 March
Conference

Ecological Debt

Centre for Human Ecology,
Edinburgh

Speaker: Judy Kelso,
Friends of the Earth

www.che.ac.uk/view_event.php?id=24 has details

30 April
Conference

Building More Houses

London Marriott Hotel
www.thewaterfront.co.uk
has details

29 April - 1 May
Event

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Business Design Centre,
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