

## LAND & LIBERTY

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### THE COMING CO-OPERATIVE COMMONWEALTH

A very ancient legend comes down to us telling how, because of their sins, the Gods sent the Sphinx to afflict the people of Thebes. The dreadful animal established herself on the highway and to all who passed propounded a riddle. Those who could not give the answer were promptly devoured, till at long last one young man guessed rightly, and the Sphinx leaped from the cliff never to be seen again.

Now, modern society is cursed with a special Sphinx of its own who also propounds her riddle which, if unanswered, will mean its destruction. Punishment, indeed, is already upon us, and as the days pass, must grow in severity. Its signs are monstrous inequality in wealth, idle rich and industrious poor, relations between master and man reduced to a mere dogfight, class warfare, threatened revolution, and pervading all, the bitter sense of wrong among great masses of our population. Such signs are evidence that something is far wrong.

The riddle of our modern Sphinx is: "Why does well-being fail to keep pace with progress?" The answer is, "Because the people are disinherited and their birthright handed over to a section of the community." Did we but realize how true is this we would hasten in the building of a new society founded on the equal right of all men to enjoy and to use nature's free bounties and in the building would destroy for ever the modern Sphinx and all her works.

A true Commonwealth implies harmony. That is the indispensable condition of successful association, and harmony implies equal rights or, if you please, equal liberty. To attain harmony an end must be made of all artificial distinctions which violate the principle of equal rights. If men's equal right of access to nature's storehouse be denied, harmony is for ever impossible, and with it all hope of a stable society. For this artificial division of men into landed and landless drives a wedge through society from top to bottom. It brings in its train undeserved poverty side by side with unearned wealth, and hard working poor, with nothing but their labour to sell, whose very manhood is undermined because of their dependence on a possessing class for the mere chance to earn a living. Given such conditions, he would be a sanguine man who would expect anything but class consciousness, a bitter sense of wrong, and class warfare.

To build anew men have no need for any of those

elaborate schemes of State Socialism, Communism, Bolshevism, Dictatorship of the Proletariat, or "strong" Government of which we hear so much to-day. All such schemes are tyranny, open or disguised. They involve bureaucratic control, management and discipline, for none of which things free men have any use. Diogenes, of old, basking in the sunshine and at peace with the world, aroused the interest of Alexander the Great who, standing before the tub which served as the sage's simple dwelling, asked what he could do to help him. "Sire," was the reply, "all I request is that you stand out of my sunshine." In like manner, our new Commonwealth will not tolerate any form of Dictatorship whether it be of the Elite, the Aristocracy or the Proletariat. Nor will it have any use for a State Socialism which involves control of legitimate human activities. The intentions of all such people may be excellent, but they will not be wanted. And above all our new Commonwealth will not permit that any man or class of man, shall, through their ownership of nature's bounties, levy toll on or obstruct other men in earning their living. All will, politely but firmly, be asked to stand aside and leave their fellows in freedom.

As in imagination, I see it, the new Brotherhood will conform to the following conditions:—

1. It will be based on equality of opportunity and mutual service.

2. Every member will reap where he sows—not a penny more and not a penny less. Thus will each enjoy the full fruit of his toil which, after all, is the *only* "fair wage," despite fashionable talk of "living wage," "minimum wage," "subsistence wage," "union wage," and such like wages, all of which assume a helpless producing class, dependent for a living on the good graces of others.

3. Conditions will be such that no man will be dependent on others for life and employment.

4. Just as the individual will reap where he sows, so will the community reap where it sows. Just as the individual will get his "fair wage," so will the community get its "fair wage."

5. Our new Commonwealth will be a growth from within itself, resulting from a knowledge by the people themselves of what is right and good. It will come from the bottom and not from the top. It will not be imposed by "supermen" of any kind whatever, whether they present themselves as politicians, princes, dictators, or proletarians.

Taking our first condition, it is surely clear that equality of opportunity implies, first and foremost, equal rights in land. Whatever else may be necessary, first things must be done first. No true community could include landed and landless, for some are thus put in a position to command service from others while rendering them no service in return, and this is the antithesis of co-operation. A labouring and a parasitic class result from any such unnatural division and this is incompatible with any commonwealth, which must bear the stamp of no class.

Our second condition, that each shall reap where he has sown, is only to say that each shall be rewarded according to his usefulness. Our Commonwealth will respect the natural law that should be, but is not now respected—the law that what a man makes is his own. To-day this cannot be, for being denied free access to the source of

all wealth, the common man has no alternative but to sell his labour for what it will fetch on a market overcrowded by others in the same plight, so that what he receives as wage is determined by this one-sided competition and has no relationship to what he makes. Under these conditions the "fair wage" is unattainable. A story is told of John asking Mary in marriage. "What do you earn?" asked she. "Six pounds a week," answered he; and so they were joined. On the first Saturday he put two pounds in her hand, and this conversation ensued:

Mary: "What's that?"

John: "My wage."

Mary: "But you said you earned six pounds."

John: "So I do, but I don't get it!"

He who can tell why John does not get what he earns, answers the riddle of the modern Sphinx. The fact is that being dependent on others for employment because divorced from land, he never can and never will get what he earns, no matter how useful and how productive his labour may be. Well may the reformer of our time cry with the prophet of old: "Restore to thy people, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive yards and their houses." In our new Commonwealth, that bitter cry will find its answer.

The third necessary condition of successful association, that no man shall be dependent on his fellow for life and work, again requires equal freedom of access to land; with free land available as it would be, no man would have to choose between begging for work and going without it.

Our fourth condition that just as individuals will receive their "fair wage," so will the community as a whole receive its "fair wage," insures that our Commonwealth will combine all that is good in Individualism with all that is good in Socialism. There will no longer be any conflict between these apparently irreconcilable creeds, for in our Commonwealth the clear line will be drawn between what is rightfully the individual's, and what is rightfully the community's. Each will get his due, the former enjoying all that comes to him from his personal service, the latter, the full rental value of the land, every farthing of which it itself has created. Thus will the new Commonwealth establish and harmonize the rights of each.

Under these conditions of equity, I can see the population spreading and the powers of production so increasing that the people will be oppressed by no taxes and all public services will be free. The profound but simple measure of economic justice on which is built our new Commonwealth will secure for the people travel of every kind without fares; construction and maintenance of roads without charge; water, light, sanitation and security without rates or taxes. The cost of these and all other public services will be defrayed from land rent which owes its existence to the presence and activities of the whole community.

Having, by this appropriation, slain the dragon of land monopoly, we shall at the same time have taken from capitalism whatever evil is now in it. The strength of the capitalist lies only the weakness of the workers and the weakness of the workers is their dependence on others for leave to work. In our new Commonwealth the dispossessed man on the hunt for a job will no longer exist. There

will no longer exist that reservoir of unemployed labour which depresses the whole wage level and places cheap labour at the service of the capitalist.

In the form I foresee it the Co-operative Commonwealth is no mere dream. One day we shall surely witness its coming because it is the form of human association which harmonizes with natural law and with human instincts. A free earth is the foundation on which the Ideal State must be built. On that sure rock will be established a structure of justice, harmony, happiness and liberty such as will realize our fondest hopes.

W. R. LESTER.

## COMPLIMENTARY DINNER

To Col. Josiah P. Wedgwood, M.P., and  
Mr. Andrew MacLaren, M.P.

Under the joint auspices of the United Committee, the English League and the Henry George Club (London) the Rt. Hon. Col. Josiah C. Wedgwood, D.S.O., M.P., and Mr. Andrew MacLaren, M.P., will be entertained to Dinner in the Victoria Mansions Restaurant, 24, Victoria Street, Westminster, on Tuesday, 17th February, at 7.30 p.m. Mr. Charles E. Crompton will preside.

This will be a welcome occasion to congratulate our good friends, and ourselves, on their notable victory at the last General Election, to have them as honoured guests and celebrate their return to Parliament, where their influence is an invaluable asset to our cause.

Col. Wedgwood first entered Parliament in 1906 (as a Liberal) as member for Newcastle-under-Lyme, which he has represented ever since. In 1918 he went over to the Labour Party and in the late Labour Administration held Cabinet rank as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. He has fought many successful electoral battles. His latest triumph was to be returned at the 1924 Election with a majority of 3,801 over his Conservative opponent.

Mr. Andrew MacLaren was elected Member for Burslem and Tunstall at the General Election of 1922 but met with a reverse in 1923 by the narrow margin of 67 votes. Not dismayed by this "accident," he maintained a vigorous campaign in the constituency and in 1924, with a majority of 606, succeeded in defeating the strong combination of Conservative and Liberal party forces put against him in the field, championed by a candidate who labelled himself a Liberal.

Col. Wedgwood and Mr. Andrew MacLaren, apart from all their services in Parliament, on the platform and with the pen, have established, in the Pottery constituencies they represent and over North Staffordshire generally, one of the great strongholds of the movement in the country. It will be a pleasure and a privilege to meet these two upholders of the Taxation of Land Values under such auspices as a Dinner in their honour, and it will be the wish of the company to give them all possible encouragement in the uphill fight they have now to wage, unfortunately at great odds, in the House of Commons.

Our readers in London and vicinity are urged to note the date—Tuesday, 17th February—and do what is in their power to ensure a large attendance.

The tickets are 4s. each and applications for them should reach the United Committee, 11, Tothill Street, S.W.1, not later than 16th February. Morning Dress.