



## LAND & LIBERTY

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### STEALING OTHER PEOPLE'S JOBS

Speaking on 24th November at the "Railway-men's Sunday" meeting, under the auspices of the Harlesden Brotherhood, at the Harlesden Congregational Church, Mr J. H. Thomas, the Lord Privy Seal, said:—

"It is not only uneconomic, it is not only unfair, but it is against the nation's interests, for women to work for what they call pin-money, and deprive other people of legitimate work. No legislation can cure that. Moral responsibility is the greatest factor.

"I should be the last to say a word that could be construed as implying that I am in any way unmindful of the absolute necessity of women working as well as men, but I often wonder how many women there are in industry who need not be.

"Years ago we fought very hard to obtain pensions for people after a certain period of work. Policemen and men from the Army and Navy benefited more than any other class. There is something morally wrong when the individual who has obtained his pension at the public expense allows himself, because he is assured of a decent income, to deprive other people of a living.

"I use these illustrations to distinguish between moral and individual responsibility and State action."

It must be granted that Mr Thomas puts into clear words what many others are thinking but fail to express, though they allow it to influence their attitude towards economic questions of great practical importance to the nation. We are obliged to Mr Thomas for stating the case so bluntly.

According to him it is unfair, against the interests of the community, and morally wrong that women should do productive work unless under pressure of need. Pensioned policemen, soldiers and sailors

also come under his ban. According to Mr Thomas, people of this kind are wronging workers when they enter the labour market because, in thus adding to their income they do others out of a job. Apparently it is their duty to lead idle lives. This looks like nursery economics, but coming as it does from the Minister of the Crown whose special province it is to deal with the evil of unemployment, the matter must be taken seriously.

On reading Mr Thomas's words, our mind is carried back to a subject which once upon a time was very keenly and seriously debated—should or should not the inmates of our prisons be set to useful work, and thus become self-supporting? There were those who answered "Yes," because they thus pay for their keep, and there were others who answered "No," because they thus take work from honest men outside the prison gates.

If it be true that when people like pensioned policemen, soldiers, sailors, and girls in comfortable circumstances, take useful employment they wrong others by depriving them of work, surely the fact must be of much wider application. It must apply all round to all classes, and accordingly *no one* should take on a job for fear of depriving his neighbour of one.

According to this view, society is a seething mass of conflicting interests. In making a living, every man and every woman is injuring and not helping his fellow-men. We, on the contrary, had fondly thought of society as a voluntary co-operative organization for mutual aid whose *modus operandi* is exchange of services between the individuals who compose it. But if the former view is correct, Mr Thomas is quite right in urging those who are not forced to work for their living (and others too) to stand idle. And are we not then driven to the conclusion that the less useful work comfortable people in general do, the richer and busier shall we all become? But it must be asked why the taboo should apply to comfortable people alone, for if they, in working, take employment from others, so must those who depend on labour for their daily bread also take it from others.

In the mouth of a good Socialist this exhortation to idleness has a queer ring, for it gives countenance and approval to all who live on the fat of the land without working. If idleness be right for the suburban Miss in her comfortable home, or for the ex-constable with his pension, surely the same rule must apply to the Duke with his rent roll and the rentier with his income from the Funds! But, fortunately, the doctrine is not true, for, without any exception, those who live without working live at the expense of those who do work. And it is not true that men or women who work productively do others out of jobs, because what they thus earn puts them in a position to buy the products or command the services of other workers, which they could not have done had they remained idle. In earning a wage and spending it, men not only work for themselves but elicit service from others.

Why then does the idea, so clearly expressed by Mr Thomas, meet with such wide approval? We think it is because of the general assumption that the number of jobs is not capable of expansion.

Of course, if that is so, it cannot be denied that when one man takes a job, there is one chance less for the other men. As *appearances* certainly support this view it must be explained *why* they do so, for until the explanation is forthcoming the view will persist and Parliament will continue to be urged to such absurdities as keeping young people off the labour market by raising the school-leaving age, reducing the age for pensions with the object of limiting the labour supply, and keeping foreign produce out of England on the ground that it takes work from Englishmen.

Looking around, people see and experience a bitter fight for jobs, with many would-be workers on the "dole." There is not enough work to go round, as they say. Unemployment, more or less acute, is looked upon as inevitable and it is thought the most we can do is to limit its severity. Assuming that this state of matters is all a part of the natural order, it certainly does seem wrong that a man should take on work when he can live quite well without it and others need it more than he.

But unemployment of willing workers in reality is no part of the natural order, as it is assumed to be. On the contrary, it is a *scourge* brought on by unjust laws. Let men but realize this, and it at once becomes apparent why it is hard to get the chance of working. Nature in her bounty provides a workshop—the natural resources of the earth—in which there is room for all and to spare. So boundless is this workshop that were it open to all, lack of work would be unthinkable. Within this workshop opportunities for employment are more than abundant, and if these opportunities are not available it is because entry is denied to all but the favoured few whom we allow to bolt and bar the doors as greed or fancy takes them. The scarcity of opportunity which results from this obstruction we regard, in our blindness, as a natural phenomenon and forthwith embark on schemes artificially to reduce the numbers fighting for such jobs as are left available. To-day men and women are *disemployed* rather than *unemployed* and the closing of Nature's workshop is responsible.

The essential first step to the fullest possible employment is to liberate the sources of production. Nothing less than setting free the land will suffice, and this ideal condition can be attained by the taxation of land values. Let the value of the bare land be separated from the value of improvements (if any) made upon it, *i.e.*, separate the value of the bare land from the value of houses, factories, railways, docks, farm buildings, walls, drains, etc., etc., and impose taxation on the bare value of the land, whether it is used, partly used, or held out of use.

This land value policy, the merits of which are once more being widely canvassed in the Press and on the platform, means using land to its fullest capacity. No more idle builders and idle building sites; idle miners and undeveloped minerals; idle labourers and idle fields. Under such conditions of land free from the fetters of monopoly nothing could stop wages (purchasing power) from rising and nothing could lower the higher wage level, so long as men's desire for better food, clothing and shelter remains.

Not only would there be greater production from which the higher wages could be paid, but the present one-sided competition for jobs made artificially scarce by land monopoly would give place to competition among employers for workers.

The present system of taxation, by encouraging non-use of valuable land (through its exemption from taxation when unused) and heaping the load on those who make proper use of their opportunities, provides a most formidable barrier between the would-be worker and the source of wealth. The true remedy is not to build new experimental social orders, but to remove those obstructions which prevent the system we have from working properly. When, *under free conditions*, that system is found to fail, it will be time to try another. The remedy for a wrong is to cease the wrongdoing.

The remedy we advocate is the direct taxation of land values. The effect of such taxation—falling as it does on monopolists who withhold valuable opportunities from use—is to compel them to throw open land of every kind to employment and production. The bolts which now bar Nature's workshop would then be drawn and her unlimited opportunities for useful work would disclose themselves to our view. Instead of more men than jobs, the order of the day would be more jobs than men and the impious superstition that opportunities for employment are scarce by decree of Providence would cease to dominate our minds, along with all the mistaken ideas and legislation that spring from that superstition.

W. R. L.

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There will also be available shortly *The Condition of Labour*, by Henry George, which has been out of print for some time. The published price will be 1s. net, cloth bound.

The third publication we are able to announce is the *Gems from Henry George*, the excellent compilation made by the late Rev. A. C. Auchmuty. This is a re-issue of the book as originally published in 1912 by A. C. Fifield, London. It will be on sale, bound in stiff paper covers, at 6d net.

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