

# LAND & LIBERTY

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## Farm-workers' Wages.

Reporting the half-yearly feeing market at Aberdeen, the *Glasgow Herald* (24th November) says: "The attendance of employers was small. Quite a number of young men must have left the market without securing employment." The report adds: "The following was the run of wages for a half-year: First horsemen and cattlemen, £20 to £22 and a little more for added responsibility; second horsemen and cattlemen, £18 to £20; third horsemen, £13 to £18; boys, £8 to £12." It is a drab and gloomy picture.

On the other side of the account we have an increase of food taxation during the past three years of £13,000,000, subsidies, doles and grants in relief of rates to perhaps twice that figure and increased prices due to quotas of a very large amount. The consumer has suffered, the agricultural labourer is no better off, the farmers are still complaining, but the landlords benefit.

## The Hairdressers' Petition.

The Belgrade correspondent of the *Sunday Observer* (2nd December) added to the gaiety of the nations with this message: The Association of Hairdressers of Yugo-Slavia has appealed to the authorities to introduce measures to restrict the importation of safety razors. They view the practice of shaving at home with alarm, and consider that its further spread is likely to deprive them of their livelihood.

Bastiat poked fun at Protectionist nations with his classic story of the Candlemakers who petitioned for the sun's light to be excluded, pointing out how they, as well as the makers of tallow, wicks, and candlesticks, would enjoy more trade. The Hairdressers of Yugo-Slavia deserve to go down to history as living testimony to the adage that truth is stranger than fiction.

## Derating Houses.

A proposal that working-class houses should be derated, just as agriculture and industry have been, is put forward in a report issued by the P.E.P. (Political and Economic Planning) group. They say:—

"It is not always appreciated that the reason for high rents is often an excessive and inequitable house tax which falls with crushing severity on the lower-paid workers, and is called local rates.

"Local rates average 2s. 9d. on working-class families, and thus quite commonly form a hidden weekly tax of between 5 and 7½ per cent on the incomes of families living on £2 to £3 a week, while in extreme cases the burden may well be over 10 per cent."

The derating of working-class houses would reduce rents by 2s. to 3s. a week.

The proposal made by P.E.P. is that the rateable values of houses let at 12s. a week or under should be taken at 25 per cent of the present figures.

The *Daily Herald*, in commending this proposal for sympathetic consideration, very properly says: "Rates, of course, are a house tax. And as such fall with inequitable severity on poor people, in defiance of every accepted principle of social taxation. The local rating system taxes houses heavily and so discourages their production,

just as the notorious window tax discouraged the supply of windows."

Both P.E.P. and the *Daily Herald* appear to contemplate that the revenue lost to the local authorities under this plan should be made up to them by means of a grant from the Exchequer. This ignores the fact that some 50 per cent of the national revenue is raised by indirect taxation which is quite as burdensome as local rates. It also ignores the still more important consideration that, under present monopoly conditions, there will be a strong tendency for rents to rise as the rates are reduced. The only substitute for the present system of local taxation which avoids these difficulties is the rating of land values. If that were adopted, rents would tend rather to fall than to rise, owing to the competition of the unused land which would be thrown into use by the economic pressure of a land value rate. Under such a system there is no reason why the present rating system should not be abolished completely, both in regard to all houses and in regard to all other property as well.

## Unemployment and Liberty.

Speaking at Marischall College, Aberdeen, on 14th December, Dr Alexander D. Lindsay, the Master of Balliol College, Oxford, dealt with "Unemployment and Liberty."

He said that the economic system was such that if persons became unemployed it was impossible for them to fend for themselves. They felt in a position of dependence, which was surely incompatible with the liberties of which they were so proud.

Dr Lindsay described the feelings of one unemployed man who said that he felt like a ghost. He had no recognized place in society, nobody wanted him, and he had lost the fellowship of his workshop and his social background. He had no work to do, and his hands were getting soft. In other words, he became a powerless and disillusioned unit.

Answering the question, Could anything be done to help these men? Dr Lindsay said that if they were prepared to use force they could deal with the unemployment problem. The Government could place the unemployed in a labour army where they would be fed and paid as though they were in an army.

This method is already virtually in operation in Germany. Its essence lies in this: If land cannot be obtained for people to work on at a price which will give them a reasonable return for their labour, then wages must be compulsorily reduced in order to make it possible to work excessively priced land. Dr Lindsay thinks that the alternative is some kind of voluntary occupation, but at what rate of wages? Surely the only alternative to compulsion is to reduce the price of land so that men may obtain voluntary employment for remuneration which does not under-cut the wages of their fellow men.

As Dr Lindsay himself said, the curse of charity was that people believed they could help others by giving subscriptions. We might add that the curse of restriction is that people believe they can cure its evils by imposing more restrictions, instead of by establishing liberty.