

# LAND & LIBERTY

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## PEACE AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

By Alexander Mackendrick

THE PURPOSE of this article is to offer an earnest appeal to the Leaders of the Peace movement for a due consideration of the economic problem that underlies all our efforts to moralize the thoughts and feelings of our fellow-men. The grim fact of poverty and economic insecurity frustrates these efforts more or less everywhere. Men who are literally fighting against their fellow-workers for a coveted job, with a hungry family in the background of their thoughts, are almost impervious to the sentiment of human brotherhood. Their memories moreover tell them of the conditions that accompanied and for some time followed the period of the Great War, when work with good wages was plentiful and involuntary idleness or poverty unknown. Is it wonderful that the logical faculties of such men should short-circuit and induce feelings akin to a positive desire for another Armageddon?

In view of such reflections we beg of our Preceptors in the noble work of spreading the gospel of Peace and Good Will among the nations that they will at the same time face this ghastly spectacle of degrading poverty amidst abounding wealth that disgraces our country; that they will make careful enquiry as to the root cause of this poverty, and listen to those who seem most to have Reason and Righteousness on their side in the remedies they offer. Logically, the righting of this great wrong should have taken precedence in time of the problem of International peace. We ought to have removed the mote from our own eye that we might have seen more clearly the beam that deflects the

vision of our neighbours in other countries. But we know that time and circumstances are pressing, and we can now only ask that the poverty problem be recognized as equally urgent with that of international relationships and equally menacing to the stability of civilisation. If, despite the clamour and smoke issuing from the armament factories we are to succeed in promoting legislation that will mark the beginning of the end of this "crime" of poverty, we shall want the sympathy and support of Pacifists in return for that which we now extend to them.

There is at present a large and steadily increasing body of opinion in this country and over the world, which holds that there is but one *primary* cause of poverty, and but one remedy—to remove that cause. That group of thinkers—which now includes many of the most distinguished professional economists of various countries—traces the phenomenon of poverty which they recognise to be an *unnatural* development in human affairs, to the interference not only with Natural law but with the Moral law that is involved in the power that has lain for generations past in the hands of private landowners. That power consists not only in the assumed right to appropriate to their own uses the annual rental-value that accrues to most land, but the power to obstruct human industry by holding land—the prerequisite of all industry—out of use until a higher price or rent can be obtained than existing conditions make possible. "The People" are thus impoverished in two ways. They are taxed to the extent of the natural revenue of which the landowners have

deprived them—a revenue which they by their presence and activity have brought into existence; and they are impoverished by their enforced idleness when opportunities on the land whether rural or urban are withheld from use. The "Remedy" proposed is a very simple one and will involve no shock to constitutional customs or to the routine of taxation authorities. It is merely to change the basis of taxation from Industry and its products to the annual value of the land with all its contents and amenities.

The members of the movement for the Taxation of Land Values are prepared to stand or fall by their conviction that the proposed reform will, if properly and fully applied, bring about the complete extirpation of poverty. This is, it must be admitted a large claim, and when contrasted with the simplicity of the means of achieving the result, it is not surprising that it meets

with incredulity. Most people like Naaman the leper of old have a rooted distrust of simple cures for seemingly complex ills. But the elementary facts of human life are so simple that the wayfaring man, though a fool need not err therein: and these facts are that Man is a land animal and requires as a first condition of his life that he have free access to his native habitat. To abolish poverty at the base of the social structure where Man makes his first contact with Nature would be to inaugurate the reign of Justice not only at that point but through all the superincumbent social strata. For it is that unemployed carpenter or engineer that is the real menace to the security of us all. *Under conditions of economic justice it is safe to prophesy that all men will be Pacifists.*

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### The Budget, Land Values and the Parties

Our Parliamentary report shows that Land Value Taxation was not overlooked in the debate on the Budget proposals. Noteworthy statements were made by Mr R. R. Stokes (Labour), Sir John Withers (Conservative), and Mr D. Adams (Labour), who had been successful in catching the Speaker's eye.

Sir Archibald Sinclair led for the Liberals and urged the Taxation of Land Values as one of the sources of revenue which the Chancellor of the Exchequer should be drawing upon in place of the additional taxation he was imposing on incomes, on petrol and on tea. The next evening, 28th April, Sir Archibald, as Liberal leader, was on the radio speaking for his party, as Mr C. R. Attlee spoke for the Labour party the night before in criticism of the Budget proposals. In his radio address, Sir Archibald elevated the Taxation of Land Values to the first place among the right alternative sources of revenue. This is a timely word not only to the public generally but to the Liberal party in particular which at Bath on the 20th of this month will be taking resolutions on its policy. Sir Archibald's is the specific declaration that is wanted and cannot too often be repeated.

But more than that. It is much more than a revenue question. Land Value Taxation is the means whereby to promote the better use of land and release natural resources from the hold monopoly has upon them. It is the means whereby to stop taxing the producer, the business man, the working man and the results of individual earnings. So this question of deriving revenue from the publicly created value of land is fundamentally related to the housing question, the unemployment question and the better distribution of wealth and opportunity.

Another thought is very important. Sir Archibald's statement, as that of any speaker advising the Chancellor of the Exchequer these days on the same lines, must mean what it says—a National Tax on the value of all land apart from buildings and improvements, and not any qualification or partial and inadequate scheme such as increment taxation. It is a question of the tens, nay the hundreds of millions, which regularly each year should come directly from the economic rent of land thereby not burdening nor penalising any industry but turning a public fund into the public treasury. As a

fact, it is not a party matter at all. It cuts right across parties; or better stated, it would combine all the forces making for better conditions into a united movement to secure for this people a society based on elemental justice.

Sir John Withers' contribution was significant. He associates Conservatives in this demand and he is perfectly right; for when mere political party ties are loosened for a moment, those who have been calling themselves Conservatives on other issues have been proved over and over again equally keen with any other citizen to "untax the work of man's hands and tax the value of land instead."

### The Pennine Unchained

Mr Ivor Brown with his power of brilliant description wrote in the *Manchester Guardian*, 9th April, about the plan proposed by Mr Tom Stephenson and Mr T. A. Leonard for the creation of a Pennine Way—that is, a walkers' track which will lead right up the spine of England from the Peak to the Cheviot. This magnificent trail as provisionally planned and mapped will cover about two hundred and fifty miles. "The unchaining of the Pennine and the creation of a Pilgrim's Way for the new and blameless Border Raiders," Mr Ivor Brown writes, "is a noble conception. . . . The Pennine mixture of limestone and millstone grit is a peculiar creator of naked and noble outlines. The treeless, surging uplands of our Northern Counties, here tumbling into sharp downfalls, there yielding to easier and larger dales, present England with a kind of backbone whose spacious grandeur, scant of striking summits and so the more generous in provision of tremendous vistas over billowy seas of heather and the rough fell grass, has few foreign parallels."

But thus far it is an imaginative plan, for Mr Brown has to point out that the liberty which is so common in the Lake District is by no means so public in the Pennines. There are fifty miles where freedom of passage has to be secured, more than thirty being in the neighbourhood of the Peak notoriously a bad area for access. "What a plague to man," he writes, "are the unwitting grouse whose innocent presence is the cause of so much greed, builds the unsocial fence, and makes the moorland a battle-ground instead of a source of healing for nerves and tempers and a fountain of much-needed peace! . . . The situation is bitterly absurd. On the one hand the Government is crying out (and