

The Situation in England

By Alexander Mackendrick

THE political situation becomes more acute day by day. All eyes are on Paisley, where a bye-election takes place tomorrow. Mr. Asquith, who got shelved at last election by the Coalition government, stands as an independent liberal against a tory and a labor man. If he wins, it is expected an attempt will be made to revivify the old liberal party, which in the meantime is half-dead. If that happens, then the question for Singletaxers is as to whether they may indulge hope in that direction, or whether their sympathies must be given wholus-bolus to

the labor party. Some of our best men, Wedgwood, Outhwaite, Dundas White, have gone over to the laborists. Their labor program contains much that all of us dislike, nationalization of mines etc., but they do include the land question as among the first requiring attention, though few among them or their working class leaders seem to have come within sight of a realization that it is practically a taxation question. My hope, however, lies in my conviction (for which I see many good reasons), that the leaders are gradually being educated,

partly by experience and partly through the influence due to the new recruits from our body whom I have named.

At the present time public attention centers upon the housing question. I have pointed out before that the "natural" rent of a house based upon the cost of production, even at the present high cost of material and builders' wages, and with the cost of land added, would adapt itself naturally to the increased ability of the people to pay higher rents, for it is remarkable how in every trade and business the wages of the workers and the average profits of the masters have expanded in response to the decreased purchasing power of the sterling pound. But the real trouble is that local taxes on houses or rather on the rentals of houses have nearly doubled in every municipality in the country; and when to this is added the Imperial property-income tax on the rental of houses, it means a total burden of about 18 shillings in the pound, or almost a second rent in itself—which of course must be borne directly or indirectly by the house occupier. If the building of automobiles were penalized in the same way, how long would the automobile industry endure? If a man after paying say £1,000 for a car, and estimating its "life" at five years, were compelled to pay a tax for the mere privilege of running it of say about £200 per annum, before allowing for cost of tires, petrol, and general upkeep, who would indulge in such a luxury, and what encouragement would be given to automobile builders to produce them? Of course that local taxation must be met by the people of a locality somehow, and must in the last analysis be paid for out of the profits of industry. But the point I wish to emphasize is, that by taking site-values as the standard by which to measure each citizen's contribution to the municipal purse, the burden can be distributed in an entirely different way—in a way that would make it bear much less heavily on the fringes of the city where dwellings are needed, and much more heavily in the centers of cities where it can be most easily borne, and where the most scandalous "hold-ups," and consequently the most flagrant evasions of just contributions to the public needs are actually staring us in the face if we will only look at them.

All of which considerations bring me around again to the thought that I am trying hard to hammer into the consciousness of my Singletax friends here—and which James R. Brown has made so central a part of his teaching—that it is really a taxation problem we have to deal with, and that for all practical purposes we may let "land" drop out of our gospel altogether, however strongly we may adhere to our basic belief, that the earth is the Lord's and not the landlord's, and that he hath given it for the children of men. Since I began to view it in this light, the whole problem of economics has simplified itself immensely to my imagination. My intention is to concentrate on the idea that as there is one right way and a thousand wrong ways of doing anything, from the driving of a nail to the building of a cathedral, so there is one right way of collecting public revenue; and nature has given us a distinct leading as to what that right way is. I always find that along that line one avoids all the frivolous objections and difficulties that are advanced against the assertion of "natural rights" in the use of the earth, etc. The old fashioned Singletaxer is apt to forget that nationalities, societies, and municipalities are artificial productions, and that our wisdom lies not in harking back to primitive or unartificial conditions, but in directing our artifice so that it will not run counter to natural law, but rather run parallel to it at all points.

The Appeal of Charity

I RESPECT the benevolent impulse behind the appeal for charity and share it. But that impulse pushes me in a different direction. The tree of Social Injustice is a prolific bearer. Its leaves are **Insufficient Wages, Unemployment, Want, Ignorance, Sickness, Intemperance, Crime and Abnormal Mortality.** Private charity labors unselfishly to pick off these leaves, but so long as it is left standing, this tree will continue to throw out several new leaves in place of every one that is destroyed. I prefer, therefore, to devote such time and means as I can to chopping at the roots of the tree itself.

Our present system of taxation, serves the double purpose of burdening industry and in-