

## WHO SHALL OWN THE LAND?

### Mr. Andrew MacLaren Challenges the Duke of Northumberland

The amazing evidence given by the Duke of Northumberland on 15th December before the Coal Commission, where he so boldly and arrogantly asserted the property rights of landlords and royalty owners, is an asset beyond price to the cause of the people versus the land monopoly. The Duke minced no words in the claims he made and his widely published defiance leaves no doubt about the issues that are at stake in the most fundamental question any nation was ever called on to settle.

Mr. Andrew MacLaren, M.P., took up the matter with the Duke and drew him into a controversy that got a prominent place in the columns of the *DAILY HERALD*. It was a timely service, emphasizing to the readers of the leading labour paper that the first democratic reform must be the overthrow of land monopoly.

In his open letter to the Duke, Mr. MacLaren maintained that "a person can only claim that to be his private property, if he has produced it by his own labour, or has exchanged something he did produce, or rendered some labour service for it, or has had the property freely bequeathed to him by someone who had a rightful claim. *The title-deed to property is based on a labour effort which established it.* If the Duke cannot prove that the ownership of the land which he now claims is based on a labour effort, either on his part or on the part of those who bequeathed it to him, what are the foundations of his claim?"

Mr. MacLaren further pointed out that no Royal Charter could override the rights of posterity.

#### THE DUKE'S ARGUMENT

In the course of a long reply, the Duke of Northumberland, wrote:

"No working man capable of serious thinking would assert that 'the title-deed to property is based on a labour effort which established it'—an assertion which is as contrary to common sense as it is to every law human and divine. Moreover, if it were true, it would justify not the confiscation of the landowners' wealth, which is the product of the labour, public spirit, and devotion to duty of many generations of landowners, but of the Labour Party funds, which are the product of legalized extortion and organized deception.

"Nor would any educated working man ask the Duke such a question as whether he made the land. He would know that the prairie value of land is nil, and that its present value has been created mainly by the labour, the enterprise, intelligence and capital of the landowner.

"Nor would such a working man deny the obvious truth that the King, as head of the State, was entitled to grant the land to those best able to look after it—a denial which evinces total ignorance of the historical and ethical foundations of civilized society.

"Above all, no working man capable of reasoning at all would assert that the robbery of the landowner would not impoverish the State. Every Board School boy knows it would result in national bankruptcy in a week, owing to the destruction of the whole credit system of the country and of security for all property of every kind.

#### MR. MACLAREN'S REJOINDER

Both letters appeared in the *DAILY HERALD* of 11th January with a leading article on the subject, and on the 12th, Mr. MacLaren's rejoinder was published

pressing the Duke to support his claims with more substantial and reasonable argument.

"You find yourself," Mr. MacLaren wrote, "to be the owner of land and all the mineral wealth embedded in this land. You never made the land, nor have you exchanged anything produced by your labour with the person who did make it, nor has it been freely bequeathed to you by anyone who had a moral claim to it. An elementary acquaintance with history shows that the origin of all property in land was robbery, on the part of a few, of the common rights of the people.

"Do you deny that all men have equal rights to life? If you do not, do you agree that if I have an equal right with you to live, that therefore I have equal rights with you to use the land which is the very basis of human existence? If I am debarred from making use of land by some private interest, is it not clear that the actions of these interests are denying me my right to life?"

"You speak of the land as 'the landlord's wealth,' which is the product of the labour, public spirit, and devotion to duty of many generations of landowners. Land is not, and never can be wealth. *All wealth is the product of labour applied to land.* Land is the source from which all wealth springs, and I want you to prove that the labour, public spirit, and devotion of you and your forbears have ever created an acre of it. The value of the land rises in proportion to the growth and demands of the population, and is therefore a communally-created value which belongs to the people."

#### REFUSAL TO DEBATE

The Duke of Northumberland sent a characteristic letter (published in the *DAILY HERALD* of 25th January and other papers) to Mr. George Lansbury, M.P., in reply to an offer to arrange a public debate between the Duke and Mr. MacLaren. The debate would be "a waste of time" for the reason that "no section of public opinion worthy of any consideration questions the morality of land ownership" and that "the proposal amounts to an invitation from an insignificant society of robbers to debate the morality and the equity of the Eighth Commandment." In fact he would rather not meet (in what to the public would appear to be friendly rivalry) "persons whose views are subversive of all civilized government and society."

#### THE VIEWS OF MR. J. R. CLYNES, M.P.

Addressing a public meeting in York on 26th January (*TIMES* report), Mr. J. R. Clynes said:—

"Great landowners whose acres had often been the improper gift of kings, or, at best, had been acquired because of some ancient service or personal favour, did not appear to understand what a crushing burden such private ownership of land had been upon the industries and social activities of the people. The Duke of Northumberland, in declining a challenge from Mr. Lansbury to debate questions of land ownership, refused, as he said, to discuss the question because, among other things, 'the demand for debate came only from an insignificant society of robbers.' The truth was that there was a significant and ever-growing section of the people who were not out for robbery, but were chasing those who had robbed society for generations. An enlightened people of future ages would rock with laughter when they looked back upon our times when people permitted an insignificant section of the country to own and control the land which, throughout all ages, should be the property of the nation for national benefit.

"If the Duke of Northumberland thought fit to decline a challenge, he ought to do it with the grace which his station demands and not descend to the

language of the vulgar to denounce those who question a privilege which has no root in moral law or national liberty, Monarchs have, with agreement, forfeited their authority in many countries for the mutual good of the country and the monarchy itself. But the great land-owners are as tight now as ever, and dukes, who ought to depend upon their brains and ability for a living, insist upon getting a good living from the labour and brains of others."

## THE DUMBARTONSHIRE BY-ELECTION

### Mr. Wm. Reid's Campaign

A by-election took place last month in the County of Dumbartonshire, Scotland, with Mr. William Reid, Secretary of the Scottish League for the Taxation of Land Values as the Liberal candidate. It was the usual three-cornered contest, the other two candidates representing the Tory and Socialist interest respectively.

Polling day was 29th January and the result, declared on the 30th, was as follows:—

Lt.-Col. J. G. Thom (Conservative) ..	12,680
W. H. Martin (Labour) .. ..	11,610
Wm. Reid (Liberal) .. ..	2,146

Seventy-five per cent of the electors voted. At the General Election in October, 1924, the result was Conservative, 16,223; Labour, 12,872; no Liberal stood.

In his address to the Electors, Mr. Reid boldly advocated the Taxation of Land Values claiming it to be a Liberal remedy and relating it to housing free trade and unemployment. His programme also included retrenchment in public expenditure with peace and security based on an efficient League of Nations. The address was accompanied with the illustrated leaflet, "Idle Land and Idle Men."

The Liberal candidate did everything he could to make the land question the dominant issue in the contest. But as he himself said, "the Liberals were under the weather and that made it impossible for him or any man to win the seat at this time; yet the fight was worth while."

Liberals openly declared their intention of voting for the Conservative candidate, the reason given was that Mr. Reid could not possibly be returned and that a vote for him was a vote for the Socialist candidate; there were Liberals who voted for the Socialist candidate because they believed the land value policy could only be carried by the Labour Party; and there were others who could not make up their minds how to vote on this occasion.

A correspondent who was in the campaign writes: "I am sure Mr. Reid would have polled many more votes if the electors had thought he had a chance. The complete absence of any organization until the last few days made it hopeless for any Liberal candidate."

Interviewed by the GLASGOW HERALD after the poll, Mr. Reid said:—

"It was the timidity of the members of my own party that let me down. My opinion is that Mr. Martin received as many Liberal votes as the Conservative candidate did. The effect of the refusal to fight at last election and the hesitation in the beginning on this occasion has been to send a proportion of Liberals into both the other camps. The odds against me were tremendous. It was not so much political opposition I had to fight as the unhappy situation, the demoralisation, of Liberalism at the moment. That was most inopportune for me."

## LAND VALUE TAXATION AND RURAL LAND

### Some Liberal Opinions

Capt. R. T. Evans, of Cardiff, who was a member of the Land Enquiry Committee and Liberal Candidate at Llanelly, in a letter to the SOUTH WALES NEWS, 30th December:

"Since the universal assumption by the State as and from an appointed day of the freehold of all cultivable land has been abandoned, the case for rating the value of all land apart from improvements has become irresistible. I, for one, would like Wales to insist very strongly that if these compromise proposals are to be accepted in preference to the original, then rating reform should be regarded as a foundational principle thereof.

"This is already the case in the suggested treatment of urban land, but the machinery originally proposed for dealing with agricultural land needed by towns for the erection of buildings and for other communal purposes, has in the new scheme been scrapped. Up to the present nothing has been suggested to take its place. For myself, I see no satisfactory way out, apart from the extension to agricultural land of this same method of rating and taxation. The need for focusing Welsh opinion on this matter and on others of equally fundamental importance is urgent and I hope that the Executive of the Welsh Federation will take immediate steps for the purpose."

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Mr. Hopkin Morris, M.P., addressing the Cardigan National Farmers' Union, 16th January, reviewed the present position of agriculture at length and urged that the only way to deal with the land problem was to adopt the Liberal policy of taxation of land values.

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An enthusiastic conference of Sussex Liberals met at Lewes on 18th January, to discuss the party land policy. The meeting approved the policy accepted by the Liberal and Radical Candidates' Association and expressed the opinion that the rating of rural land values should be incorporated in the new policy.

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Dr. W. Black Jones, writing to the SOUTH WALES NEWS of 28th January: "The present land campaign has been based on principles which conflict with the maxims of political economy, and I have endeavoured in your columns to show that they are unsound. The Candidates' Association have watered them down, without basing their amendments on any sound principle, and still the policy has caused further dissension in the Liberal Party, and there will be no hope for unity till a policy is evolved which will stand the scrutiny of general economic laws.

"At the meeting on Saturday last of the executive of the Welsh National Liberal Federation, I asked Mr. Lloyd George a question as to the effect of our rating system on improvements and food production, and he replied, "The present rating system discourages improvements," and added that he had given up a great deal, and asked me also to do the same with regard to land values.

"I respectfully submit that the Green Book has been amended because it is economically unsound, but on the other hand, I claim that the policy of land value taxation is absolutely on a foundation of rock, and to tamper with it is fatal, and this is the reason why the Liberal Party is in such a plight.

"It may be of interest to remind your readers of the attitude of the executive of the Federation to the land