

LAND & LIBERTY

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THE NEED FOR EXPANSION

Mr P. M. Stewart, the Commissioner of the Distressed Areas, in his recent Report argues for diminishing the working population so that others will have more employment. Boys and girls are to be kept longer at school and anyone who employs them will be punished. At the other end of life, increased old-age pensions, forfeited if they do go to work for gain, will induce men and women after their 65th year to withdraw their competition for jobs and make way for younger people. There is not enough work to go round. That is the implication, with the deduction that those who make a living by adding to the store of wealth, far from rendering a service, are injuring if not ruining their fellows. By that reasoning, every worker is a parasite and an enemy of society whether he is under 18 or over 65 or his age comes in between.

The proposals made for shortening hours of labour are innocent enough, if perfectly futile. But monstrous are the ideas governing the proposals which lead Mr Stewart to advocate emigration as a cure, when "transference to the British Empire overseas" can be resumed, and finally to the creation of military camps and the recruitment of young men for the Services of the State. It is an unemployment policy dictated by the theory of over-population proving again that Malthus still dominates in the counsels of State.

Alas, it is not an isolated instance; for the Malthusian view, scouting the evidence of the plenty all might enjoy, scouting the fact that unemployment and the extremes of poverty and riches are due to an elemental injustice in society, now rides roughshod over Europe and the world. It is the Italian Government's excuse for coveting Abyssinia and it inspired the damnable admission made by the Foreign Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, in the House of Commons, as to the aspirations of that Government being justified.

The *Daily Telegraph* of 13th August, commenting on a particularly outspoken article by Signor Gayda, Mussolini's firebrand in the press, said that seriously-minded Italians held that disarmament on their East Africa front would result in a dangerous increase in unemployment; it is estimated that 35,000 civilians are drawing regular pay for their participation in public works in Eritrea and Italian Somaliland; these men mostly from the south are sending home their savings; another 200,000 are under arms there; about 190,000 are under arms in Italy; factories are working day and night to equip these armies and send out materials for public works; to bring all these men home without a victory (military or diplomatic?) . . . would be, it is held, a fatal political and economic error with far-reaching consequences.

It is an easy transition from Mr P. M. Stewart's report and recommendations to the practical and fuller

adoption of given policies by the Italian Government, all in the faith that to make work, promote emigration and cause money to circulate is the remedy for unemployment. Here we have the military camps on the grand scale and the determination to win new territories for settling the alleged surplus of population. The governors of the distressed area which is called Italy—and miserable are the conditions of the working people—are acting brutally and violently; but who among their prosecutors will question the assumption with which they started and the economic motive that has driven them to such desperate courses? If our own country has not gone to war, it has wasted millions of treasure and incidentally built higher the walls of privilege in trying to solve the unemployment problem by just such tactics, trying to make work by all manner of public expenditure and voting £45,000,000 for emigration schemes that crashed against the monopoly price of land, teaching a lesson seemingly quickly forgotten as to who really owns the British Empire. People speaking in the name of New Deals and Five Year Plans, advocates of public works at the cost of the taxpayer and for the enrichment of the landowner, all who ignore or deny the evils of land monopoly and repressive taxation, who are indifferent about if they do not approve fiscal or other barriers against international trade, who look to foreign investment and the emigration of working people as solvents of the unemployment problem—it is not for them to cast stones at this Abyssinian adventure regarded solely as an economic proposition, supposing it did have Haile Selassie's full consent and support.

Sir Samuel Hoare said on 11th July, "We have always understood Italy's desire for overseas expansion. . . . We admit the need for Italian expansion." Well may it be that Sir Samuel has in mind the growth and development of the British Dominions and those "wide open spaces" of which our pompous Imperialists speak when they talk of shipping people overseas out of the country where they have no foothold. The British people it is said is fortunate in possessing those wide open spaces as an outlet and safety valve for its growing population; but it has monopolized more than enough of the world to the exclusion of other nations and cannot without hypocrisy criticize an Italy or a Japan or a Germany for demanding a similar refuge for its surplus inhabitants. Signor Gayda has thus put it very bluntly*: "Is Great Britain, which possesses a quarter of the globe, disposed to revision and partition of her existing Empire? Are those other great States at Geneva so disposed? It is the eternal problem of the haves and have nots. If the League were just it would redistribute those Empires." It is quite remarkable to notice the sympathetic response in the British Press to this Italian point of view, not that any part of the British Empire should be handed over to Italian ownership but that Italy has a good case before the League of Nations as the next grabber of fertile territory with natural resources that are worth while. The only proviso is that the League, while negotiating this peaceful penetration and rich spoil for concessionaires, shall prevent the robbers and the robbed from going to war and probably starting a world conflagration. They must help to preserve collective security. It is the password of the League.

The admission of Italy's need for expansion, as it has been stated and in its context, is the greatest blow that could be struck at the peace of the world or the welfare of the Italian people themselves. In the first place who is to define this alleged need? Or the need of

* *Daily Telegraph* report, 13th August.

any country whose statesmen, not daring to grapple with the domestic causes of industrial distress, are now encouraged to seek expansion as the alternative to convulsion? Shall it in Italy's case be Mussolini or the Negus or some appointed arbitrator? Remember always that it is a quarrel about natural resources which are to be appropriated for the benefit of one party at the expense of another. Already in 1906 by Treaty between Britain, France and Italy, Abyssinia without consulting its inhabitants was to be zoned off in what are called spheres of influence, but in reality fields of exploitation for the profit of favoured groups. Under the aegis of the League of Nations, representatives of the three countries came together in 1935 to decide how much bigger the Italian slice might be by way of bribe to avert a war of conquest. The bribe has been rejected and the world waits to know what the dread outcome is to be.

Great Britain it is said possesses a quarter of the globe but the British working man, what does he possess? Mr P. M. Stewart can speak for the inhabitants of the distressed areas, and over the whole country the statistics of unemployment and public assistance answer only too shockingly the suggestion that the existence of an Empire makes any difference to social conditions in industry. If British possessions occupied a half instead of a quarter of the globe the general level of wages would not rise by a single penny, since wages are determined by one thing and one thing only, namely the price that must be paid for the use of land. In the last analysis the division of the product is into wages and rent. High rent means low wages, and the withholding of land at an excessive price brings the disaster of unemployment. Great Britain's need like Italy's need is great. It is the need of statesmen who will speak the truth about the causes of poverty, who will uphold the rights of their peoples against the enemy within their own gates, who will discard all pretences that territorial aggrandisement abroad can minimize or undo the effects of social injustice at home. The Italian people have been educated into the belief that over-population is their whip and scourge. Not the Dictator only is to blame. It is this false doctrine, this flaming lie, so carefully and successfully cultivated, in the interest of privilege and monopoly, applauded by leading lights in the high places around the globe, that is hounding on the nations to another Armageddon.

A. W. M.

THE LAND UNION ON THE CAMPAIGN

The annual report of the Land Union, published in the August-September issue of the *Land Union Journal*, says that the most important event which has taken place during the year 1934 is the repeal in the Finance Act of that year of the Land Value Tax introduced by Lord Snowden when Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Labour Government. The Land Union takes credit for the part it played in securing the repeal, but the report continues:—

"Although for the moment the danger is past, we would impress upon property-owners that the agitation for a tax of this kind continues, and the London County Council have recently instructed their Finance Committee to report on the advisability of imposing a rate on land values, and several local authorities throughout the country have passed resolutions advocating methods of this kind.

"The Council of the Land Union are fully aware of the campaign which is being carried on to reintroduce

site value taxation, and, provided the continued support of members of the Land Union is given to them, will resist any attempt which may be made to give legislative effect to systems of this kind."

We need hardly add that this is a challenge which we are sure that our readers will take up by increasing the assistance which they give to "the campaign" to which our opponents pay such a testimony.

HIGHER ASSESSMENTS FOR RATING

Quinquennial valuations for rating have recently been made in London and other parts of the country. Bitter complaints have been made in the press by aggrieved ratepayers who have had their assessments increased. In some cases it is alleged that the increase is so large that businesses have been closed down.

The blame is laid at the door of the assessment authorities, but they are merely carrying out the law, which says that the assessment must follow the rent. The real source of the trouble is that rents are high, combined with the fact that our present system of rating imposes the burden upon the use which is made of land and not on its value. The better used land is and the more highly improved, the greater will be the assessment and the burden of rates. Let it remain idle, however, and no matter how valuable it is the owner need pay nothing.

The periodical outcry against increase of assessments solves nothing. It is the system that is at fault. Those who protest most loudly against increased assessments are often those who oppose most violently any proposal to alter the system. They give the impression that they do not mind how much other people have to pay, so long as they escape. Those who are concerned to improve matters might well ask their local authorities to follow the example of Cardiff and other municipalities in pressing upon the Government the need for a thorough-going reform of the whole system.

At a Ministry of Health inquiry into an application by Fleetwood (Lancs) Council for permission to borrow £10,000 for the acquisition of land, the town clerk said that land consisted of 9,320 square yards, and the purchase price was equal to £1 1s. 5½d. a square yard. The plot was valuable, having a frontage to the promenade, overlooking the sea. The land was freehold and free from any rent charge, land tax, or tithe rent. Though so near the railway station, tram and bus termini, and ferry, it was the only vacant land on the promenade for a distance of nearly a mile now available for the building of boarding houses.

"In the course of a year or so the land is bound to increase in value on account of the great popularity Fleetwood has attained."—(*Manchester Guardian*, 6th July.)

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It would appear that the reason certain Powers are repudiating and defying the collective system is that they are failing to get access for their people to the world's abundance. The historian of the future may find that one of the chief causes of the present distress in the world is the restrictive system adopted by Great Britain in 1932. That closed the last safety valve and increased the difficulties of all trading countries. A return to free imports in a madly Protectionist world would be most beneficial to this country and to the world. Economic nationalism was an overgrown and flabby giant.—Mr Ramsay Muir at the Liberal Summer School, Cambridge, 6th August.