

## TAX MONOPOLY

By R. L. Outhwaite, M.P.

A year of International slaughter has passed, and competent authorities reckon that about 5,000,000 men have been killed and some 7,000,000 disabled. The cash cost of the process has probably been at least £5,000,000,000, or, say, £1,000 per man killed. As the Russians are retreating into their own country, and the other Allies are stationary, it is obvious that these totals must be regarded as only a fraction of what will be the ultimate cost. Great Britain will soon have spent her first £1,000,000,000, and will have to prepare for the second. The provision of men to make good the "wastage" does not occasion much concern; flesh and blood can, as a last resort, be commandeered by conscription, but cash stands in another category. If we borrow we must pay dear; if we commandeer by taxation we must discriminate. Consequently the City sent a deputation last week to Mr. Asquith. So far all has gone well for the magnates. Their wealth has not been levied upon, but has been borrowed at a rate of interest which has left them wealthier than before. But further taxation is inevitable, and the City went to inform the Government what form it should take. In fact, they went to ask for taxation. This seems uncharacteristic, but the reason is easily discernible. Taxation must come, and the City went to urge that the "basis of taxation should be broadened," and that the war revenue should be raised by taxing imports and those commodities in particular, such as tea and sugar, which are termed "luxuries" by the rich, because the poor are supposed to be able to exist and work without them. The City having secured  $4\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. on wealth created by the poor, expropriated by privilege and monopoly, and loaned to the Government, went to propose that the interest and further expenditure should be met by taxing the old-age pensioner with 5s. a week and a London landlord with £500,000 a year from ground rents on the same basis, according to the amount of tea and sugar each consumes. The Prime Minister was a little diffident about accepting the proposal; he could not be otherwise, for it would not do to give the tip to importers. But he blessed the proposal that wages should be taxed. So the people may take it that their immediate and future fate at the hands of the taxgatherer is now being decided. The rich man as a lender has been made richer, the poor man is to be made poorer as a taxpayer; so will the war for freedom and democracy be financed if stern protest be not made.

But useless will be all protest unless those who make it put forward and resolutely press an alternative based on principle. Manipulation of the income tax will not suffice; a new and fruitful source of revenue must be indicated.

Let us first seek for a principle. We went to war, we are told, to save Britain from the fate of Belgium. The Germans have seized and hold the soil of Belgium. Therefore we have spent £1,000,000,000, or soon will have done so, to prevent the soil of Britain passing into German possession. Clearly, then, those who should, in the first place, be called upon to pay are the landholders of Britain, who are being secured in their possession by the 3,000,000 men beneath the colours. The landholders of to-day have no other title than that passed down from feudal days. The Crown still owns; the privilege of possession carried with it obligation to provide the Crown with the means of defence. The time has now come, after centuries of defalcation, for the Crown to compel the obligation to be observed.

The valuation of land under the Budget of 1909 has not been finished since the landowners bluffed Mr. Lloyd George into substituting a State valuation for the owners' valuation at first proposed. But a National Register has been compiled of the landholders of the United Kingdom. It

should be possible as an emergency measure to follow precedents set by Australia and New Zealand. The Commonwealth Labour Government called upon all owners of taxable land to declare its value free of improvements, and to pay a land tax thereon, and the product was forthcoming in about six months. The tax has been increased 50 per cent. by the present Labour Government to meet in part war expenditure.

The Land Valuation Department has created the machinery; everyone with an interest in land value could be forthwith called upon to assess it and pay a tax thereon. Then the Duke of Westminster, with his £25,000,000 odd of London land value created by the people, will pay for its defence, and the City, where land has sold at £4,000,000 an acre, will be defended by its owners instead of by the old man or woman with 5s. a week; or, to put the case more impersonally and correctly, to meet the common danger the "communal value of the land," to use the Prime Minister's phrase, should be levied upon and not, as proposed, the necessities of the people, all of whom have paid into the common fund for permission to live in Britain.

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## THRIFT

"It's a costly war." The remark is heard on every hand. At the street corner, as in Parliament, it is spoken impressively, with a sage and pessimistic wagging of the head. It is costly, we are told, in life and treasure. No doubt it is so, but it is costly in another respect too often forgotten.

Cherished liberties are passing from us, silently, swiftly, may be for ever—passing, while in our impotence we cannot stay them if we would, like the soul passing from the body. Many of our finer feelings, too, are slipping away, leaving us hard, cruel—hate throbbing in our blood, strive as we will to guide our purpose by a grand ideal. Redeeming qualities outshine, it is true—heroism, self-sacrifice, disinterested action—but for the most part war is prolific of evil and an utter abomination.

Still, it is the cost in life and treasure that impresses itself most deeply on the general mind. Death we have always with us. In natural course the souls of men are ever passing hence. Sudden calamity strikes down the young and the brave even in times of peace. Out on the deep and down in the mine tragedies are terrible and frequent. But in these wild days death is a strangely familiar guest, and we have grown accustomed to scan the long columns of casualties almost without a shudder. We merely remark—"Tis a cruel loss in human life."

What is the cost of the war in life? Were it measurable by numbers it could be easily stated. We have lost some 50,000 or 60,000 men. We have lost more than one in every thousand of the population. The war has raised the death-rate from the normal 15 per thousand to 16 per thousand. It may not seem so much stated thus, but the value of human life cannot be reckoned in figures. These are better fitted to measure our loss in treasure.

At what must we figure it, then, in terms of treasure? £3,000,000 per day, we are told. A tidy little sum, sure enough; and a terrible drain on our resources, thinks the ordinary man, with a touch of pride that he belongs to a nation able to spend so much. What is meant by the phrase "a drain on our resources" few stop to inquire.

In point of fact we have little need to worry over the expenditure of £3,000,000 per day. It won't hurt us—that is, if we know how to handle so big a sum. After all we are not, as a nation, spending so very much more than we were spending in times of peace.