

LAND & LIBERTY

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AN EXPIRING RACE

Speaking at a showyard lunch of the Fife Agricultural Society held at Kirkcaldy, 17th June, Lord Novar (better known in other days as Mr. Munro-Ferguson, M.P.) lamented the unhappy fate of the landowners as an expiring race. The unfair and unendurable pressure of public burdens, he said (we quote from the DUNDEE ADVERTISER), was bringing our old and tried land system to an end.

Yes, the system is old, and judging by its fruits it merits a speedy consignment to oblivion, and the sooner the better for the landless man and woman on whose honest industry it lives and thrives. What is landlordism? It is the legal right of the few to fleece the many who must use land, or perish. What are its characteristics? Let the deserted countryside, the empty highland straths and glens, the wretched housing conditions of the land worker, the overcrowded slums of our cities and towns answer the question.

How was land ever made private property? Herbert Spencer, in his SOCIAL STATICS, says: "It can never be pretended that the existing titles to such property are legitimate. Should anyone think so, let him look in the chronicles. Violence, fraud, the prerogative of force, the claims of superior cunning—these are the sources to which those titles may be traced. The original deeds were written by the sword, rather than with the pen, not lawyers but soldiers were the conveyancers: blows were the current coin given in payment; and for seals, blood was used in preference to wax."

The witnesses to the truth of this indictment cannot be gainsaid. They are to be found abundantly in the pages of history. The teaching is that the race of landowners has ever been a hindrance and not a help to progress in any age, and especially at any epoch-making time when hopes were high as to any general advance. Landlordism has cumbered the ground and no good thing can be said of it. In essence it is a denial of the individual right to life and the pursuit of happiness, and politically it is fraught with ever-increasing danger to the State. The personal and political liberty the people have won from established tyranny strive in vain to better the common lot against the entrenched injustice of land monopoly. It is the abiding menace to prosperity and peace, and what appears to save it

from the hands of the landless masses is the fact that law and practice has ever confused property in land with property in the things produced by labour. The natural distinction between the two has been lost, or almost lost, in the struggle to keep industry on its feet at any cost, and in the warring ideas as to how best to make for the perfect State.

Speaking as an "agriculturist," Lord Novar proceeded to tell his audience that the landowner, occupier and farm servant were all in one crazy boat, and that the best thing to do was to federate among themselves for mutual protection. The calm assumption here, be it observed, is that the interest of land-owner and land-user is one and the same. Yet it is plain that the one man takes without giving; the other gives and takes what is left. The boat is crazy enough, and it does look the worse for the voyage. If the worker, the occupier, and the servant act wisely they will get out into a boat of their own and leave the landowners to take care of themselves. It is a crazy notion that landowner and labourer must rise or fall together. The one depends on ownership, the other on industry.

If the race of landowners were to expire, what would happen? Nothing that is calculated to disturb the balance of Nature, and honest labour would be relieved of a mighty and ever-present burden. The land with all its potentialities and promise would remain and industry, relieved from its chief parasite, would go forward by leaps and bounds, knowing only the limits of human needs and desires. Let us on the other hand try to imagine what would happen to the community if the workers were to expire, or to take themselves off on some boat to other and more promising adventure. The land in that case would also remain as it is, and the owners, forsooth, would require to set to work for their own living. They would miss the occupier, and the farm servant, but who shall say these latter would regret the loss of the rent collector, with all his vicious rules and regulations?

Verily, in the economy of Nature there is a fundamental difference between a mere landowner and a worker.

Lord Novar, when he talks of the expiring race of landowners, occupies narrow ground in the argument. The old order may be giving place to the new, in his circle, but in this change of masters, the occupier and the tiller of the soil can have little or no concern. The rent of land has still to be paid out of the earnings of industry, and the tribute does not lessen by the change. As rent rises wages fall. Wages may rise gradually under the present dispensation as some contend, but that is as a quantity; as a proportion of the gross produce every advance in rent is at the expense of wages. "Hitherto," says John Stuart Mill, "it is questionable if all the mechanical inventions yet made have lightened the day's toil of any human being. They have enabled a greater population to live the same life of drudgery and imprisonment, and an increased number of manufacturers and others to make fortunes. They have increased the comforts of the middle classes. But they have not yet begun to effect those great changes in human destiny, which it is in their nature and in their futurity to accomplish."

This bold challenge to society, with its pompous claim to obedience and respect, tells to-day as when

it was made by the great teacher some two generations ago. It is a despairing reflection on our politics, and if it could not be remedied, would surely be the greatest tragedy of civilized life. It would be like a decree of Nature to the effect that the human family was born to slavery with no possible means of escape. But this bewildering prospect has given place to a higher conception of better things. Economic science has not been wholly devoted since Mill's day to the service of the "master class." Something has been accomplished outside the attachments to "institutions that have long been deemed wise and just," and led by the lamp of truth some investigators have patiently and with unerring skill won their way to the underlying cause of the great failure.

In the light of advancing thought and experience the road to success has been revealed, and opened up at points for well-planned settlement. The prospect is pleasing enough and the belief prevails that the problem of poverty in the midst of abundance is no longer a mystery. Reducing land to the level of commodities produced by labour from land has been and is the great confusion, and out of it has come the insidious form of economic slavery which dogs the footsteps of every would-be emancipator. This view of the matter will continue to make headway if only those who hold it stand up to the call for greater and far-reaching publicity. There is hope and encouragement in the growing body of opinion that the land is the natural storehouse, where each and all must find the supply of their daily wants; that the economic rent of land belongs to the people as a whole, and that it ought to be appropriated for communal purposes. The Taxation of Land Values combined with the untaxing of industry is the key to increased production and to all enterprise. What is the alternative policy? Manifestly, what we are suffering from under the present system—bad trade, low wages, unemployment, doles, high taxation, general unrest, cynicism and reaction.

Our land laws were framed to place the workers in subjection to their "betters"; and now after a long and bitter struggle for the franchise, we begin to realize that how the people think is more important than how they vote. The confusing of land with labour products as legitimate forms of property must have engendered the confusion of tongues that are to be heard in the senate, on the platform, and at the street corner. In the industrial and political camps of the workers, so defined, the voices jangle out of tune, as in other movements designed and equipped to hold their end up in the interminable struggle for a living wage. Unrestricted citizenship has settled nothing and the Soviet principle of voting clashes with the more democratic rule. The trades unionist, the co-operator, the farmer, the teacher, following the race of landowners, are out for special class representation. What is this but the failure of Parliament to function for the good of the common weal? Devolution, the independence of Scotland and Wales following Irish independence, is now a question of practical politics, but no one can say that this step will re-establish the democratic principle. It will take "the deeper cut" to win back the old-time faith in government by and for the people, and not for any section.

As to organization, it is a proved failure to-day,

as always. Unemployment, not for the first time, has broken the best and most efficient of it in pieces. If organization can protect the workers and save them from the ravishes of industrial depression, if it can raise wages and keep them high, let it do so now. If it can merely record the higher wages that raise the standard of comfort in times of general prosperity, it is hardly worth while. It is out of abundance that high wages can come and organization, as such, cannot make such provision.

As we write the voice of the Chairman of the Labour Party Conference (Mr. F. W. Jowett), held at Edinburgh last month, is heard telling us that the Party stands, among other things of no great importance, for the appropriation of economic rent, accompanied by the abolition of all taxes on food and necessary commodities. This pronouncement is significant, and with Mr. Henderson's recent statement on the Taxation of Land Values, marks the trend of opinion in the ranks of the Party towards fundamental land reform. But what counts is the implications. Before economic rent, or the Taxation of Land Values can be dealt with the valuation of the land must be furnished and made public, and if this is to be made an issue by the Labour Party at the next General Election the sooner it is made known the better it will be for the prospects of the reform.

The Labour Party are in the habit of arranging special campaigns on special subjects. Why not organize one on the need for Land Valuation and the Taxation of Land Values? Mr. Jowett puts a capital levy and a graduated income tax before the appropriation of economic rent. The capital levy is in the air and the further taxation of incomes already beyond the limit would not add to the comfort of a single worker. The taxation of incomes, however graduated, would not open up a single idle acre to labour; the Taxation of Land Values would open up millions of acres. If what the worker wants is bargaining power, he must have an alternative, and this the tax on land values will provide.

In his Address Mr. Jowett put war down to capitalism hungering for new opportunities for investment. This, he declared, was the urge that drove the diplomatic puppets into the last war. On this strain the question never put is, what is the urge that drives capitalism in search of markets abroad? The answer, selfish greed and love of power and ostentation, does not take one very far. There is no science about it, and it does not satisfy. Capitalism is monopoly by another name. If the term has any meaning it denotes a combination of monopoly and capital, or in other words it is organized capital rooted in land monopoly. But the further question is, what is behind this again? How does land monopoly begin, and how is it sustained? The answer is, population and the development of the arts. That being so, the quarrel is not with population or the arts, but with the monopoly that starves the one and imprisons the other. When we free Nature, art will take care of itself, and so will population. Whatever Mr. Jowett may say or think to the contrary, not all the organized capital in Europe could injure labour—or dictate terms to the worker—if land were free from the stranglehold of monopoly.

Turning to unemployment, Mr. Jowett is reported to have said that the nation solved the problem

during the war. That is a common enough misapprehension. The nation did nothing of the kind; it was the circumstances of the war that made labour scarce. Employment was assured to all who could work or help in any service and wages rose accordingly. This experience goes to show that if we would raise and maintain wages we must abolish the man at the gate. This is the person that fixes the wages of those inside and not the nation, nor the employer, nor any agent of "organized capital." Undue taxation of capital, organized or otherwise, will stop its production and so narrow the field of employment; the Taxation of Land Values will stay where it is put and widen the field of employment.

Criticizing Mr. Jowett on his sharp contrast between wealth and poverty, the WESTMINSTER GAZETTE says that the spending on luxury is due to the fact that surplus wealth is not attracted back into industry as in normal times. The answer to this question-begging statement is that in so-called normal times there is ever the same vulgar display of wealth by the upper ten thousand, while millions of their fellow citizens get along on the verge of starvation. But the W. G. has pointed to the crux of the problem. It is an opening for industry that is wanted, and if it prosecutes the inquiry on these lines it may yet serve its day and generation as an organ of enduring economic democracy. But this is just where Novar's race of landowners cuts athwart official Liberal aspiration and the practical policy that this testing time requires.

J. P.

"THE CROWD AT COATBRIDGE"

Where then shall we get the rates? The answer is straight and clear; the public expenses shall be met by the community taking the land values which they, as a community, create. The crowd gathers on a certain area and forms a town called Coatbridge. That area steadily increases in value from its agricultural rent of £1 an acre per year to £1,000 per acre annually, which is what it would bring to-day in the vicinity of the Fountain. If the crowd dispersed to the moors about Longriggend the rent of Coatbridge land would sink to zero, but the rent of the moss land in New Monkland would go up with a bang. What the crowd makes it should have, and no man's personal earnings need be touched for public revenue. We pave and light the streets; we have a sanitary and health department; we employ police to protect property, and regulate traffic; we have public schools and many other conveniences which make Coatbridge a desirable place to live in. The result is that the value of the land is enormously increased. The landowners take all the benefits of our improvements, and pauperism accompanies progress.

J. C.

ANOTHER ATTACK ON THE VALUATION DEPARTMENT

In the House of Commons on 28th June Capt. Pretymann, M.P., moved a new clause in the Finance Bill which would have repealed the whole of Section 4 of the Finance (1909-10) Act, 1910, and so rendered unnecessary the delivery of particulars to the Inland Revenue Department when land is sold or leased for a long term. The clause was resisted by the Government, the Solicitor-General (Sir L. Scott) pointing out that this information in regard to the terms on which land is sold or leased is essential to enable the Valuation Department to function properly. The debate was of some importance and we hope to report the speeches next month.

The proposed new clause was defeated by 172 votes to 69.

SHELLEY CENTENARY

(Died 8th July, 1822)

No change, no pause, no hope! Yet I endure.
I ask the Earth, have not the mountains felt?
I ask yon Heaven, the all-beholding Sun,
Has it not seen? The Sea, in storm or calm,
Heaven's ever-changing Shadow, spread below,
Have its deaf waves not heard my agony?
Ah me! alas, pain, pain ever, for ever!

This is the day, which down the void abyss,
At the Earth-born's spell yawns for Heaven's despotism,
And Conquest is dragged captive through the deep:
Love, from its awful throne of patient power
In the wise heart, from the last giddy hour
Of dread endurance, from the slippery, steep
And narrow verge of crag-like agony, springs
And folds over the world its healing wings.

Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance,
These are the seals of that most firm assurance

Which bars the pit over Destruction's strength;
And if, with infirm hand, Eternity,
Mother of many acts and hours, should free

The serpent that would clasp her with his length;
These are the spells by which to reassume
An empire o'er the disentangled doom.

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;

To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;

Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.

Prometheus Unbound.

In the Old Testament we are told that, when the Israelites journeyed through the desert, they were hungered, and that God sent down out of the heavens—manna. There was enough for all of them, and they all took it and were relieved. But supposing that desert had been held as private property, as the soil of Great Britain is held; as the soil even of our new States is being held. Suppose that one of the Israelites had a square mile, and another one had twenty square miles, and the great majority of the Israelites did not have enough to set the soles of their feet upon, which they could call their own—what would become of the manna? What good would it have done to the majority? Not a whit. Though God had sent down manna enough for all, that manna would have been the property of the landholders; they would have employed some of the others perhaps, to gather it up in heaps for them, and would have sold it to their hungry brethren. Consider it: this purchase and sale of manna might have gone on until the majority of the Israelites had given all they had, even to the clothes off their backs. What then? Well, then they would not have had anything left with which to buy manna, and the consequences would have been that while they went hungry the manna would have lain in great heaps, and the landowners would have been complaining about the over-production of manna. There would have been a great harvest of manna and hungry people, just precisely the phenomenon that we see to-day.—
Henry George in THE CRIME OF POVERTY.

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