

## LAND VALUES

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### "OUR POLICY"

"We would simply take for the community what belongs to the community—the value that attaches to land by the growth of the community; leave sacredly to the individual all that belongs to the individual."—*Henry George.*

### "THE DAY OF JUDGMENT"

I suppose we are all agreed on some things, one being that it is necessary, at any rate, that as a preliminary step there should be a separate assessment on site values. . . . I believe we shall arrive at a more satisfactory and more permanent result if we allow ourselves a little time and a little patience for the consideration of this problem, than if we were to introduce a comparatively small and piecemeal instalment of the reform we all desire.—Mr. Asquith (Prime Minister) to a Municipal Deputation at the House of Commons, 26th February, 1906.

There were no land reformers who would think it worth their while to have different valuation made if they were to stop merely at the collection of the Budget taxes. They were keen that the valuation should be made for a greater purpose still—in order that they might in time remove all rating and taxing from the value of buildings and improvements—the work of men's hands—and place the whole of it upon the basis of the value of the land. The result would be that the land would be free, the great monopoly would be broken down and freer access would be given to God's earth to those who were able and willing to make the best of the land. Men would be encouraged henceforward to make a profitable use of their land, to spend money upon it in labour and material, and so the wealth of the whole community would be vastly increased.—Mr. Alexander Ure, K.C., M.P., Lord Advocate (now Lord Strathclyde), London, 24th September, 1910.

For many years the Taxation of Land Values was a voice crying in the wilderness. To-day that voice spoke with the authority of law. We look forward to a bright future. They asked for taxes on our bread. We have given them the Taxation of Land Values, and the more they press us the sterner will be our reply.—Mr. McKenna, (Chancellor of the Exchequer), at Pontypool, 24th October, 1910.

In future I think I can guarantee to you that the Government will see that those noble Lords and others who own land to which a great value has been attached and added by the exertions of the community shall contribute towards all public expenditure on the real value of that land. . . . The valuation under the Act of 1909 secures for the first time the real value of the land and of the structures thereon separately, and I can assure you we mean to make use of that valuation. I cannot imagine there being any doubt in anybody's mind on the subject. I wonder why they think we had that valuation unless we meant to use it.—Mr. Lloyd George (Minister of Munitions) at Glasgow, February 4th, 1914.

When the Great Budget of 1909 was brought before the House of Commons Lord Hugh Cecil referred to it as a rehearsal of the day of judgment, and when the valuation schedules were issued the following year a Conservative Member of Parliament declared with confidence that the policy of the Conservative Party would be to repeal these taxes, dismiss the valuers, and tear up every shred of paper connected with Form IV. The Conservative Party have not yet had the opportunity to give effect to this policy and the valuers are still at their job of finding out who owns the land, and its value. The end of the job is now in sight and the Coalition Government seemed to be the opportunity to ward off the day. This was the meaning of the Banbury Amendment to suspend the work of valuation during the war. But the vigilant guardians of the monopoly interests in the House of Commons have so far come off second best in this encounter. They have realised by this time that the Land Values Group has got a stage or two beyond their modest estimation of its power and influence.

Whatever the landed interest and its spokesmen in the House and outside may choose to believe to the contrary, members of the Group have maintained a keen interest in the progress of valuation the while they have been devoting themselves up and down the country to the need and urgency of it. The deputation of Members to the Chancellor of the Exchequer last month reported elsewhere was an impressive Parliamentary demonstration of the strength of the movement. This was duly acknowledged and noted we feel sure by its organised opponents.

The supporters of the policy the Group stands for will rejoice at this triumphant vindication of democratic control in home affairs. The war, and the party truce (so named) has buried out of sight quite a number of good causes which had gained a footing in Parliament. The enemy calculated on throwing land values taxation also on to this scrap heap, but they have only succeeded in proving how strongly and firmly entrenched is the policy they seek to destroy. Perhaps this latest lesson will do something to persuade them that in this particular endeavour they are up against something the real significance of which they do not quite understand. It may help them to look into the past history of the movement, and there realise that the beginning of the agitation does not quite synchronise with their own date of the famous "rehearsal."

The demand for the taxation of land values was first formulated by Bill in the House of Commons in 1902 and behind that lies full twenty years of well directed spadework. Whatever the enemy may believe, or affect to believe, valuation was not the outcome of the 1906 swing of the political pendulum, but rather a cause if not the main cause of the swing itself. It is no mere party cry arising out of the correct soundings taken by Mr. Lloyd George six years ago. The taxation of land values was not discovered by the Budget of 1909. It was the other way about. It was the land clauses providing for valuation which made the Budget possible. The taxation of land values was well defined and well on its way to the seat of legislation before it reached the length even of a fourth-rate position in the programme of the Liberal Party.

It is clear to all who care to make inquiry that apart from political divisions and cross divisions, the policy can and does appeal to a great mass of people who do not pretend to take sides in politics, but who feel and

endure with so much patience the cruelties and the never-ending misery of the system it seeks to supplant. It is in this great and ever-growing sentiment, ever-growing not alone by our puny efforts but by the driving power of the hard facts of the case, which impels the question to Parliament, out of which the Group evolves, naturally, to speak and act with authority. Such is the case in brief for valuation and taxation of land values.

The Group are to be heartily congratulated on this striking victory. In the darkest hour in the history of the country they have shown unswerving loyalty to principle and proved themselves alert and worthy custodians of the cause they seek to advance. Not for the first time the Group is revealed as a Parliamentary force which is not to be so easily dismissed as some people seem to imagine. They have shown that they are ready to speak out and to some purpose when any attempt is made to undermine the work they have specially in hand. They are as alert and as capable at Westminster as they have been eloquent on a thousand platforms in their popular appeal for freedom and fair play to all sections of the community.

We have had to wait patiently for this long promised legislation; and we had to recognise that the promise could not be fulfilled till valuation, the basis for a tax on land values, was completed.

It is contended that this task need not have occupied so much time. We believe this to be true but we had to accept the ground plan proposed by the 1909 Government. The alternative was the wilderness. It is further claimed by sympathetic landowners, who profess to know, that the valuation made by the local valuers is in many cases absurd. This may be true, but as Lord Strathclyde was wont to say, this is where our trouble begins, for valuation after all is not mensuration. It is a matter of opinion and when opinions clash as they will do when opposing interests are at stake it takes time and some patience to effect a working compromise, especially when the work in hand embraces such an area and includes such variations. The crests and crevices fashioned by landlordism, revealing themselves everywhere, in town and country alike, in selfish greed and caprice must be first reckoned with and subdued before we can correctly gauge the mean level of economic rent.

For reasons such as these the approximately correct valuation of the land will only begin to appear when there is a tax on land values. That is to say that the tax itself will act as the most efficient valuer. Under the existing regime the value of some land is unduly depressed and will only be raised to its true level when obstructions against better use are removed, while other patches assume a value at least for industry which the tax will swiftly and sweetly reduce to normal proportions to the enduring good of the community. In the light of these phenomena a moderately accurate valuation will do to begin with. Time will enable the tax once it gets a fair start to make the necessary adjustments. This is what the valuation now being made, with all its imperfections, means to the advocates of our liberating policy. Our opponents know this as well as we do, and had there been no Group in the Commons this innocent-looking Banbury Amendment might have effectively torpedoed the ship, consigning it and its cargo of possibilities to the bottom of the sea.

As it turns out the ship still sails and we have one more pledge from one more Liberal Chancellor of the

Exchequer that the policy of the Liberal Party in regard to land values taxation remained unchanged, and that every pledge which had been given on the subject in the past would be adhered to in the fullest possible manner.

The great upheaval caused by the war has brought to many doubt, misgiving and despair as to the hope of the future for any kind of progress, and there are those who see in the Coalition Government the complete triumph of non-progressive and reactionary forces. We are not so sure. Party divisions are for the time obliterated and defined policies which were already within the boundary line of achievement appear to have gone with the party who stood for them. It is so in all the belligerent countries, and much work well done for the common-weal may have to be for ever abandoned or commenced anew. No man can say what the great struggle now being fiercely waged will leave for the reformer to accomplish.

So long as social injustice prevails, just so long will men and women find themselves taking sides, and this can only find expression in and through the political parties created and maintained for and against emancipation from unjust laws. There may be some new alignments in our politics, but these whenever and however they may come need not concern very much those who stand for our policy. This policy has its place in politics, but its greater strength lies firmly embedded in the minds and in the aspirations of a people who see and understand its far-reaching effects for good.

We almost feel grateful to the enemy and to his well-equipped organisation for bringing to us this ray of sunshine amid so much general gloom. It will hearten and encourage single taxers to renewed efforts in whatever field they may be at work. Our opponents at St. Stephens, and outside, had of course willed it otherwise, but such misadventures are but the accidents, or the failures that accompany ill-considered plans to interfere with well-established principles. At three general elections the people voted for valuation and taxation of land values. This combination is an integral part of Liberal policy and it has, at least in the House of Commons, at all times commanded the unfailing support of the Labour Party as well.

The Conservative Party, or some of them, may still dream of the time when they will dismiss the valuers and scrap their interesting collection of facts and figures. But the signs of the times are against them and their out-of-date ambitions. The selfish monopoly interests which they so tenaciously defend have been weighed in the balance, and there remains only one thing for the rent receivers and the rent raisers to do, and that is to loosen their iron grip on industry with as much grace as they can assume.

The organised defenders of privilege and monopoly are now up against new forces which will not quietly bow down to parliamentary inquiry or meekly accept the law's delay. The millions of landless men who have fought and bled for their native land will return home some day, soon we hope, and they will be looking about for their share of it. They will be putting the question: whose land is this for which we offered up our lives and our treasure, what is its price and to whom must this be paid, and why? The answer to this question should be found in the State Department concerned with Land Valuation.

J. P.