

LAND & LIBERTY

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THE ENRICHMENT OF LANDOWNERS

"This House declines to agree to the Second Reading of a Bill which . . . makes no provision for the relief of local authorities and national taxpayers by the taxation of land values."—*Labour Party motion to reject the Finance Bill, House of Commons, 25th May.*

"Those of you who heard my Budget speech last year will remember that, although it is not usual to anticipate a Budget before its introduction, I gave a very definite pledge that if I stood in the Chancellor's place this year I would introduce proposals for dealing with this matter."—*Mr. Philip Snowden, ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer, House of Commons, 25th May.*

"The Labour Party have put in their Resolution what amounts to a vote of censure upon us for not fortifying the Exchequer by raising money by taxation on land values. . . . We are pledged by the pledges we gave at the Election not to do anything of the kind. . . . We none of us know what they mean by the taxation of land values. We have no idea what revenue can be raised or how."—*The Prime Minister, Mr. Stanley Baldwin, House of Commons, 25th May.*

"I have made speeches to you by the yard on the taxation of land values and you know what a strong supporter I have always been of that policy."—*The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Winston Churchill, addressing the Dundee electors, 27th July, 1917.*

The Taxation of Land Values as a just and expedient method of raising public revenues and as a means of putting an end to "the evil of high prices for land withheld from industry" has a place of its own in the House of Commons that no change in the representation there may hope to undermine or obliterate. Whatever the fortunes of a general election may be, however the Parties for the time being may be sorted out, the question will prevail.

The first session under the present Government is no exception to the rule, and Mr. Snowden's well-timed amendment to the Second Reading of the Finance Bill is the latest vindication of the claim that the question is now a recognized part of parliamentary life and experience. Mr. Churchill had nothing to say this time on the evils of our "unreformed and vicious land system, this dog-in-the-manger game, this imposture upon the public with its crowded slums, hampered commerce, distorted and restricted development." It was left to his chief on this occasion to "whisper away" the truth about the piece which, in Mr. Churchill's own words, as a leading man on the political stage of 1909-10, was going to have "a good long run."

In his forcible speech Mr. Snowden rightly named the daily enrichment of the landlords at the public expense as a national scandal, and his

challenge to the Government, "do they admit that this growing value of land arises from causes which are in no sense attributable to the energy, enterprise and expenditure of the landowner," was not answered. Mr. Churchill uttered not a word on the subject, and all Mr. Baldwin could do was to offer the usual cheap sneer at "the record of the member for Carnarvon Boroughs (Mr. Lloyd George) in his inglorious course of action fifteen years ago," with a halting, lame confession that "none of us know what is meant by the Taxation of Land Values or what revenue can be raised or how." Mr. Lloyd George can speak for himself, and he would to some purpose, if only he and his Land Inquiry Committee had some understanding of the law of rent. Failing that, there is nothing to expect from that quarter except a further display of emotional appeal quite bereft, as usual, of any guiding principle.

If Mr. Baldwin's difficulty is the amount of revenue that can be raised by a tax on land values, and how, it can best be overcome by an honest endeavour to find out from the Valuation Department, or by a look at the scheme Mr. Snowden left in the pigeon-holes of the Treasury. Mr. Baldwin rebuked Mr. Snowden for his onslaught because they, the Government, were pledged at the general election not to deal with the Taxation of Land Values. It is ridiculous to suggest that the panic-stricken electorate went to the polls last year to register a vote in support of the existing system of rating and taxation. But even on that principle is it not true that a majority of the votes cast were in favour of the candidates pledged to the land value policy?

Nor can it be forgotten that prominent members of the Government are pledged to the principle—Lord Balfour, Lord Birkenhead, Lord Robert Cecil, not to mention the Chancellor of the Exchequer himself; and, as we search the scriptures, there is the **CONSERVATIVE CAMPAIGN GUIDE** of 1906:—

"No policy could be more fatuous than to meet these aspirations, when moderately pressed, with a blank *non possumus*, or with a cry of 'robbery.' . . . It is certainly not robbery to require him (the landowner holding for a rise) to make a contribution to the revenues of the community, on whose growth and prosperity he relies for the enhanced value of his property. . . . The proposal is advocated, however, not only on account of the advantage to the rates, but also because of its tendency to bring building land into the market on reasonable terms."

Again there is Mr. Baldwin's own testimony eight years ago in the Commons in a speech advising against interfering with the 1909-10 Finance Act, when he said with emphasis: "If we began to discuss a matter of this kind (land values) during the war everything that was not only moribund but dormant in our Party spirit would spring once more into life and take possession of us like seven devils." In these words he put up a good defence for the principle, on 6th July, 1917.

The country and its industries are in an alarming condition, and the Prime Minister in his latest pronouncement, at Welbeck Abbey, 1st June, appeals "for a 10 per cent increase in directional efficiency." This, he urges, is possible in most industries, and the effect would in his opinion be enormous. He asks us to believe that we are

in a different world from the world before the war. That may be true enough in some respects, but it is certainly not true in the matter of post-war enrichment of the landowners, and the throttling of industry by the greedy land speculator. Increased efficiency was practised in pre-war days and had then to pay toll to the uttermost to those who claim unbridled ownership in the land.

And what about the crushing burden of rates and taxes? It will take some efficiency to catch up on the post-war increase in this field of municipal activity. Is it not the case that the rate collector and the tax gatherer will continue to pursue the employers and penalize them on the annual value of any additional buildings necessary to the new efficiency? The country is in grave danger, and as John Stuart Mill says: "When the object is to raise the permanent condition of a people small means do not merely produce small effects; they produce no effects at all." It is the answer of a master in economic science, and in the art of reasoning, to Mr. Baldwin's shallow rhetoric.

In the course of his speech Mr. Snowden pointed to the development of the motor omnibus, and declared it was enriching the ground landlords beyond the dreams of avarice. It is a "new world" development, but the same thing happened in the old world, twenty or thirty years ago, in the case of the tramways, and behind that notable expansion there is the experience of the railways. Steam and electricity, like the internal combustion engine, have enriched the owners of land as every improvement, "directional efficiency" included, does and must do. The new forces that are now coming rapidly to the service of society will have the same results. That is the law and it cannot be changed by aiming at harmonious relationship between labour and capital or by kind words at works council meetings, not even when the profits of the firm, in relation to the wages paid, are open for inspection. The benefits of inventive genius and social growth go to the enrichment of the landowners.

It is everywhere apparent that special privilege is bleeding industry white, yet our public men and captains of industry have not a word to say on the subject calculated to direct thought and action to the root of the injustice. Business men, under the impression that "stable government" was wanted to lead them out of the rut, have met with a reverse that only goes to show their helplessness in the wider sea of affairs outside their own sphere of influence and direction. The stable government, at their behest, is now in being and all it has done for industry is to pile on greater burdens, put back the McKenna Duties, and try to wring a few millions from women who have shown in recent years a preference for silk stockings. It is an amazing performance.

Truly it is not politics that makes good business. It is good business that makes politics endure; and a government, whatever its colour, that governs on the principle that industry is fair game for monopoly, or that industry and monopoly are identical in aim and ambition, is not likely to alter the adjustments that are at bottom responsible for hard times and bad social conditions.

The Prime Minister admits the gross and crass

materialism of the day, and cries out in anguish that unless we hold to the highest ideals we are doomed to perish for lack of vision. It is well said, and "'tis a kind of good deed to say well; and yet words are no deeds." If Mr. Baldwin does not know how to lead industry out of the land of bondage, or if he does know and has not the courage to act, he lacks vision himself and is therefore not the man to awaken spiritual forces for any new advance. He may urge the people to highest ideals, but like centuries of such urging it is in vain unless and until the people are first given the freedom to move out to the higher ground. Freedom and progress are possible of attainment; but progress without freedom means going round instead of going forward.

One thing Mr. Baldwin has done in his social reform programme is to absorb the "New Liberalism" of the Liberal Summer School; and to be free of that embarrassment is so much gain to the real liberal forces in the Liberal Party. On the question of how to meet the cost of an all-round pensions scheme there is nothing to choose between the Conservative contributory scheme and the schemes of their opponents, designed as they are to pass on the obligation to the general taxpayer and thereby add new burdens to industry.

The only alternative source of revenue for this, as for all other measures of relief, is to be found in the communal value of the land. The Government is not looking in that direction, and Mr. Baldwin assures us that none of them knows what is meant by the policy. They boast of their attachment to the Dominions and have provided millions for others (not one of themselves) to migrate to Australia. Why not find out from New South Wales, or from the City of Sydney, what the taxation and rating of land values means to the people there?

New ideas are making for new political alignments, and the Prime Minister is in the van of this engaging development. But we need not concern ourselves much with the tendency to any new orientation, as the saying is, in our politics. The Taxation of Land Values can take care of itself. It is not only an alternative source of public revenue; in its economic incidence it is the alternative to the control of industry by the State, and to the communism that implies "red ruin and the breaking up of laws." Mr. Baldwin in his evangelizing campaign betrays a superficial grasp of the realities of the position. Increased efficiency under existing economic conditions can hold out no hope of redress. It is no cure for industrial depression. Society has by law and custom bartered away the rights of the people to the bounties of nature, and until this fundamental fact is recognized, and an honest attempt made to deal with it in terms of social justice, there can be neither peace nor prosperity.

The moral law is the law of progress, and "to freedom alone is given the spell of power which summons the genii in whose keeping are the treasures of the earth and the viewless forces of the air." Mr. Baldwin, to do him justice, is ahead of his associates in the field of high endeavour and public trust. He is manifestly influenced by the thought that we are in a world "into which new powers born of progress have entered and that will compel us to a higher plane or overwhelm

us as nation after nation, as civilization after civilization, have been overwhelmed before." But it will take something of a different scope and character than any mere ephemeral betterment in industrial organization to save us from the deluge.

The Taxation of Land Values is a simple enough remedy; it does not mean pulling down anything, or anybody, to the hurt of the community and its vital interests. It is above all Party consideration and those who understand and believe in the teaching have at their command powerful economic agencies. Every housing scheme, every new road, every new development means an increased demand for land; and the rising value of the land cannot be kept out of sight. The land agent and the auctioneer will see to that part of our propaganda.

To paraphrase the Prime Minister's call to the nation, what is wanted at the United Committee at this time is additional financial support, so to provide for "a 10 per cent increase in directional efficiency," and this we are not without hope of obtaining. The stars in their courses fight against Sisera, and the appeal is to all with judgment and vision.

J. P.

OUR MISSION AND YOURS

The political Parties are passionately calling upon their adherents for additional financial strength and with evident success. In their platform and their Press they have facilities at their command to which we may not aspire. But we, too, must be equipped for our work.

We must insist now more than ever that our emancipating policy shall be considered. Not to do so is to surrender the ground we occupy, ground won for the movement by much sacrifice and years of strenuous endeavour.

The fight for political freedom is over. How to attain economic freedom is now the problem. That is our campaign and we must make it ours.

The need for telling propaganda was never more imperative and the cry for it is insistent. There are continuous demands on the office for explanatory literature. We are urged to replace "without delay" a number of our publications of permanent value that are out of print. Meetings are always in request. Repeatedly we are asked to undertake work that would mean wise and effective expenditure.

Without the means it is impossible to provide these essential services or even to look at the most enticing suggestion.

Our first concern must be "Land & Liberty." Everyone will agree it would be a disaster to the movement if this service was not regularly forthcoming, or had to be curtailed in any way.

The United Committee seeks to impress upon you the urgent need of your special support at this time.

THE FISHERFOLK'S RIDDLE

By W. R. Lester

(Writing from St. Jean de Luz, France.)

This place is very beautiful, and is kept going by the sardine fisheries and the visitors. The fisherfolk are, without exception, the finest in physique I have seen anywhere, but there is trouble among them and the sardine packers. The other night a meeting was held, and was addressed by the Syndicalists from a neighbouring fishing town, where a syndicate or union had been formed lately, and had succeeded in getting a rise in wages from the employers. The object was to form a similar syndicate here. The meeting was well attended both by men and women fisherfolk and packers, though there was no evidence of any interest by hotel visitors, not one of whom troubled to put in an appearance. The Syndicalist missionaries from the nearby town held forth on the advantages of forming a syndicate here, roundly denouncing the employers as men, rather than the system which squeezes them, and assuming all the time that only the ill-will of the employing class stands between them and better conditions. Sufficient pressure had only to be brought to bear to drag out of the masters almost any wage that might be demanded. The class war was frankly preached.

It seems that men's wage is about 1½ francs per hour, and women's about 1¼ francs. At present rate of exchange, this amounts to the miserable pittance of about 5d. to 3½d. per hour. In the town from which the Syndicalists come they had managed to screw wages up to 2 francs and 1½ francs. A woman's grievance is that they are often called on to work in the packing factories all night through without overtime pay. They have to attend at 8 p.m., and if for any reason the boats with their catches do not arrive till later in the night, the women have to wait on without pay. Another trouble which bothers them a lot is that when catches are heavy the sardines sell for next to nothing because of the flooded market. The missionaries told the meeting that in their town the syndicate had very carefully considered this situation, and had concluded that the fishermen must not be allowed to bring into port more than a definite quantity of fish. In this way would the price be kept up and a higher wage paid. That was the remedy of the Syndicalists, and, to judge by the applause it met with, approval was general.

This set one thinking. I have put this matter of the big catches to several hotel visitors. All say there is a kink somewhere, but none can say just where it is. I have ventured to suggest to them that the plan being to restrict supply, it can be of no use to those who want fish, working folk included, but that we must not complain if this idea of restriction is a popular one, seeing that the doctrine of Protection, held in such influential quarters and so widely preached in polite circles, is based on precisely the same superstition, viz., that well-being will grow if we artificially limit the sources from which goods are drawn. I have also suggested that if it is good to restrict the catch, to, say, one ton, it would be better to restrict it to half a ton or even to a single sardine!

The real alternative seems quite clear. The truth is that the large catches of fish cannot be sold simply because buyers are scarce. Buyers are not scarce because everyone has all the fish he needs. On the contrary, great numbers within easy reach of markets are underfed and would gladly buy the fish if they could pay for them. So long as there remains a single underfed person it is ridiculous to talk of an over-supply of fish. What really does exist is under-demand, not over-supply, and this is only one out of many aspects of the problem of poverty. If wages permitted