

LAND & LIBERTY

Published by THE UNITED COMMITTEE FOR THE
TAXATION OF LAND VALUES.

Thirty-first Year. Established June, 1894.

3d. Monthly. By Post 4s. per annum.

United States and Canada, 1 Dollar.

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The Postage on this issue is One Half-penny.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF PEACE

Economic and industrial adjustments are undergoing some change, and politics national and international are strained to the breaking point. In the questioning field of hope and expectation the Locarno Treaty holds a first and ruling place. It has all the appearance of an epoch-making event, a new turning designed to stay the ravages of war and still the dread of any such calamity in the years to come. True, there are wars going on here and there and rumours of further outbreaks. It has also to be admitted that the building of battleships and the making of armaments in general bespeaks its ominous expansion. It is also true that the nations responsible for all this preparation against the next war to end war are just those whose chief men came to London on 1st December to sign the articles of the new peace. But that is a mere incident in the play; they had to function as best they could, these gentlemen, in the web that Armageddon had prepared for them. They could do no other and the spirit of Locarno was over their deliberations as they put their names to the great document. Our ambassadors of peace were genuinely moved and under the impression, as one signatory put it, "that a community of fate binds us together. If we go under," he added, "we go under together; if we would rise, we cannot do so in conflict with each other, but only by working together. Accordingly we cannot afford, if we believe at all in the future of our nations, to live in discord and enmity with each other, but must join hands in a work of general co-operation." It was a Christlike sentiment, the pith and marrow of a great occasion.

It is all very well as far as it goes and just how far it goes the history can speak for itself. Every bloody struggle in the past has ended with agreements, yet the demon of war pursues and ultimately overtakes and subdues the peaceful intentions of the day. Manifestly something is wanting in all such articles of association. A contrite heart is not a thing to question or reproach, but unless there is understanding of how to avoid conflict and the nations order their behaviour accordingly, the jealousy and the intrigues born of the struggle for "spheres of influence" will sooner or later get the upper hand. Inevitably action will be taken for which nobody is to blame, and the ethical standards now fashioned out of the last bitter experience will disappear in a blaze of passion that no one can control.

If we would "usher in a new era of co-operation between nations" the agreement must be more in correspondence with the realities of the situation. There must be agreement in essence and not in name, if the spirit of Locarno is to watch over any safe and enduring development. Politics, like patriotism, is not enough if the European family is to survive and prosper in terms of friendship and goodwill. Economic democracy must blend with political striving, and the treaty that is urgent is one that signifies the complete abandonment of the tariff barriers to free trade between the nations. Any other kind of treaty is a snare and a delusion, a mere scrap of paper unheeded and unrecognized in the sordid struggle for markets, with its rings and cartels, the dominating force in the world of commerce and high finance.

Locarno, we are told by our conventional peace advocates and by many who ought to know better, opens up the way to disarmament, and already there are signs and portents that the matter will be again reviewed. It is all to the good, but let us not deceive ourselves. Land monopoly continues to withhold the opportunities to employment and growth, and as the struggle for markets proceeds the will to peace is daily and hourly undermined. As the newspapers announced the glad tidings of the Locarno settlement, the Government and their followers were hotly engaged in erecting trade barriers between us and our neighbours across the Channel. The voices heard in the one room spoke of brotherly love and partnership; in the other of ill-will and suspicion, "red ruin and the breaking up of laws." At the Foreign Office the speech-making was of mutual trust, tranquillity and happiness to Europe; in the Commons legislation designed to counteract the menace of the "foreigner" was contained in the Parliamentary orders of the day.

The sentiment at the signing of the peace was of walking arm in arm in amity and good fellowship with our European allies; that heard in the legislature, not a hundred yards distant, labelled them one and all as our stern and efficient opponents in an eternal fight for economic supremacy. The Prime Minister blessed the work of the distinguished visitors from the six great nations who had come to the British capital with the Locarno ethic, the while he was shaping new measures to search the pockets of British citizens who dared to trade in freedom with any of them. Trade is the great agent of civilization; it makes as nothing else does for mutual respect, confidence and understanding. It conquers languages, despises frontiers, brings harmony out of discord, and binds men of different races together for the good of all. But Mr. Baldwin's Government looks askance at all this civilizing influence. He may talk as he likes about the need for peace; it is his economic policy that matters, and it should be boldly challenged as the prime cause of war and all its evil brood.

There cannot be too much sentiment made for international peace, but the main part of the platform talk on the subject, if not all of it, is as sounding brass or tinkling cymbal quite unrelated to the need of any faith or belief in the charity that rejoiceth not in economic oppression. There are

millions of men belonging to the countries concerned with the peace of Locarno employed in making the instruments of war. It is unfair to them to assume that they seek such employment. They are there because they have no alternative employment; and this is denied them by man-made laws that can be removed and must be removed if society is to "join hands in a work of general co-operation." The sentiment that ignores the pressing need for economic justice and fair play is a sentiment that has no relation to the underlying problems of life and can render no support to those who strive after right understanding and honest dealing.

It is evident that we in Great Britain, as in any other country, can best help Europe by solving our own problems, and that takes us at once to the clamant need for drastic changes in our systems of land tenure and taxation. We have a million unemployed and the case for land reform was never more urgent. Land that might be put to profitable use is going out of cultivation. Housing and coal are on the rates and every improvement is at the mercy of the land speculator and the tax-gatherer. We are given to understand that land monopoly has been found out and that at long last it is to be looked in the face without passing by. If those who now say so had held out a helping hand to the United Committee and its agencies these past seven years we could have more faith in their avowal to-day. But let that pass. We are out for a plain policy that will swiftly and surely take land monopoly out of the way of industrial development and we welcome any and every sign that points to this obstacle as the bottom cause of agricultural distress, unemployment, low wages and bad housing.

In another place we quote from the latest parliamentary discussion on the housing problem. There have been five successive schemes subsidized out of the rates and taxes, and all of them are revealed as colossal and ghastly failures. They were framed on the principle that the land question was of little or no account, and as for the working of economic law the underlying idea was to get the better of it, or improve upon it. The cry of our housing reformers was, "give us money and we will build the houses." It is on record that the more money they got the further they receded from their objective, and the more they spurned the need for the rating of land values and the unrating of houses the deeper they sank into the bog. They would not be persuaded that the land question stood for more than "sites for houses," and in any case they were out for a fight with private enterprise in the building trade.

Our housing experts and their executors were doubtless earnest and sincere in their determination to have houses and plenty of them, but the houses were to appear without disturbing any vested interest. That was an indispensable condition. It was on that principle the money was obtained, and it fully explains the failure. The Minister of Health for Scotland in the Labour Administration (Mr. James Stewart) was one of the prominent supporters of this pro-landlord housing invention, and speaking from experience in his place in Parliament,

18th December, he said: "The difficulty with housing schemes all along has been that as the subsidy increased so up went the prices. The building rings and material manufacturers extracted every penny they could from the public purse." To the uninitiated the elusive subsidy may be a difficulty, but it is nothing compared with the difficulty of getting its votaries to realize and acknowledge the cruel and costly injury to decent housing conditions that lies at their door. And notwithstanding the failure that is all their own there is no sign on their part of any conscience-stricken guilt. Mr. Stewart in a sentence destroys the case for subsidizing houses out of the public purse, and the Prime Minister answers with another application of this false and worse than futile remedy.

The taxation of land values is a policy that would open up land ripe and ripening as sites for houses, and strike a blow at the building rings and the "manufacturers" of building material from which they would find it difficult to recover. The alternative policy of the Government is to keep industry on the rates and taxes, subsidize it, safeguard it from the foreigner at its own expense, and hope for the best. It is the degradation of politics, the crowning shame of a statesmanship that seeks to solve social problems by consolidating the economic interests responsible for the existence of such problems. We have reached a stage where industry, if it is to live and thrive, must part company with monopoly, and the taxation of land values can effect the separation without any shock to industrial undertakings and equipment. The Prime Minister is out in the open pleading with the lamb and the lion, to get together for the common good; but the lamb instinctively feels that if it lies down beside its natural enemy twenty-four hours before the appointed day it is likely to waken up inside the lion.

Industry and enterprise are held to ransom by land monopoly, and wherever it escapes from this bondage it is tormented and robbed of its legitimate earnings by the State. The natural order is that politics proceeds from industry, but we have reached a time when industry is designed and shaped by the politician. What emerges from this transgression is the clamant need for a publicity campaign on the Land Question. There is no other means of escape and Mr. Lloyd George, if he had only known how to cut into the land monopoly, might have done something in his day and generation for the everlasting benefit of mankind. As it is, his ill-informed Land Enquiry Committee, instead of binding the land reformers of the country together, has only succeeded in setting them by the ears.

This is Mr. Lloyd George's third land campaign. The two first were identified with land reformers of repute whether they stood for land values taxation, housing, or small holdings. Who are the persons behind this new outburst? The Liberal Party still shelters many accredited exponents of its accepted doctrines on the land question. Men who have devoted their lives to the movement for radical land reform. Why have they been excluded from this Land Enquiry Committee? It is notoriously

clear there was no room at the board for any Liberal who was out for the Liberal policy, the policy of Richard Cobden, Campbell-Bannerman, Lord Strathclyde, Lord Oxford, and a dozen more of the same school who, when the wind was in the south, knew a hawk from a handsaw. The wind is in the north to-day, and Liberals with liberal ideas of land reform are driven to seek shelter from the blast.

Agriculture is the foundation of all other industries, and the conditions under which it operates ought to be made conducive to the best use of land. There are millions of acres of unused or comparatively unused land in this country held out of the reach of would-be users, and the rent of the land that is available must be influenced by the pressure. The idle acre fixes the rent of the acre in action, just as the idle man at the factory gate fixes the wage of those inside.

The present official Liberal land policy would lighten the burden on improvements by taxing land values. The only people who can reasonably expect to gain by this unofficial Liberal Land Enquiry scheme are the "rings" and the Government officials who will be required to manage or mismanage the national estate, and those landlords who are to be pensioned or bought out at ransom prices.

"Pay ransom to the owner,
And fill the bag to the brim,
But who is owner? The slave is owner,
And ever was, pay him!"

The slave can best be compensated by liberating the land and giving him his due share in its "communal value." It is the case that for a generation this slogan has resounded from a thousand Liberal platforms. Mr. Lloyd George in other days, when he was denouncing land monopoly, cried out, "Let's burst it!" He now proposes to feed it, nurse it, regulate it and pension it. If he succeeds in his misguided ambition, the result will be to obliterate the line of demarcation that separates Liberals from their opponents. According to their own statement in the Press, Liberal headquarters and their leading exponents of the faith are in doubt if not in despair over this new orientation prepared for their acceptance. Let them look in the chronicles for an answer to their problem. Our only comment is: that if Liberal thought, Liberal teaching and Liberal aspiration on the land question are not to be distinguished from the policy of landlord privileges on the one hand and land nationalization on the other hand, it is the end of an imposing chapter in the book of Liberalism. And in any case what becomes of the contention that in things that matter the Liberals have a place in our politics and public life that is all their own, theirs by right and not by any fortuitous event?

In recent issues we have dealt faithfully with this new Liberal land campaign and its literature. We have exposed its errors and questioned its intentions in a manner that has brought to our side many who had neither the time nor the inclination to make for themselves any independent examination; but we are surprised that some Liberals have not already denounced the scheme which they must know to be ill-liberal, unworkable and calculated to

reduce to impotence the grand principle they profess to hold in such high esteem.

An economic Locarno is an idea that merits the countenance and support of all with belief in our common humanity; but it must be given a chance to grow and develop. The Taxation of Land Values speaks for the urgent needs of municipal life and movement. It is a defined and accepted policy that may not be mauled or manipulated for personal or party ends. As Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman declared, "the subject is neither small nor trifling." It is related to the claim for freedom of trade and in so far as it will open new opportunities it has vital relationship with all other remedies that make for international peace and progress.

J. P.

"LAND & LIBERTY"

We cordially wish our readers a happy and a prosperous New Year, and desire to convey a special vote of thanks to all who have contributed to the Sustention Fund. There have been some disappointments, mainly due to hard times and unemployment, but it will be well for the journal and its related activities if the Fund is favoured in 1926 with a measure of support equal to that received during the past twelve months.

Our friend who thought to put us by way of gaining that £100 "prize" will be interested and delighted to learn that as we go to press we are only short of three £10 subscribers to make good the claim to his bounty. He may now take it for granted that his challenge has been accepted and the Fund benefits accordingly.

LAND & LIBERTY is a home-made paper, but we are deeply indebted to many who have helped by writing and speaking to uphold the "high standard of efficiency" that friend and foe alike freely and generously allow. Much enticing MS. comes for insertion in our columns and each month we must, perforce, waste-paper-basket what ought to appear in a 28 or 32 page issue. In our limited space it is a question of selecting for publication what in our opinion should be or must be noticed.

A welcome Christmas card from Australia carries the motto: "He that has a thousand friends has not one to spare." The sentiment fits in with the ambition of LAND & LIBERTY. Old friends it must keep the while it goes in search of others wherever they are to be found. There are no front seats in our place of worship and the newcomer is free to enter in with the assurance that his or her homage will not be gainsaid.

Thanks to not a few watchful and energetic volunteers the year just closed has brought an encouraging number of additional subscribers; some are already in the fighting line. What is urgent is an ever-expanding mailing list, and the discussion on the land question now appearing in the Press and on the platform provides the occasion for enlisting the new recruits that are everywhere in the making.

J. P.