

## LAND & LIBERTY

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### THE GEDDES AXE

The chief topic of the day, apart from the sentence of death without any recommendation to mercy which the electors have just passed on the Government on three separate trials, held last month at Clayton, Camberwell and Bodmin, is the thorough-going cuts into public expenditure recommended by the Geddes Committee. The final report, issued 24th February, makes a total reduction in our public expenditure of some £87,000,000. Every Department has been examined and dealt with by this "Committee of goodwill" and thousands of men in "cushy jobs" are out for any kind of raft that will carry them to dry land. The Admiralty quickly enough felt the breeze and sent out a S.O.S. before the Government had time to take soundings. The War Lords of Whitehall are thinking it out and the Education Office are digging themselves in behind a rising storm of popular indignation. The Committee suggest a cut of £18,000,000 here, and the teachers and the children and their parents have formed a defensive alliance that bodes no good for the hand that would threaten their standard of comfort and efficiency.

The Geddes Committee has made it plain enough what money for social reform has meant in the two Departments where the Government has most signally failed and brought on it so much popular condemnation. The housing fiasco has placed on the Treasury an annual charge of £12,000,000 to meet the financial loss on the schemes. The loss on land settlement, with tens of thousands of applicants not yet given what they were promised, will cost £8,000,000 a year. The "cut" recommended by the Committee is to sell all the Addison houses at half their cost, and they would similarly sell the land acquired for the Small Holding Colonies.

This exposure of the "money for social reform" theory comes too late, and the Committee were evidently disinclined or incompetent to deal with its implications. Millions can be thrown away on the wastes of Mesopotamia and all that is but so much added to the national debt. But if £10,000,000 is spent in land purchase schemes at home, that has an entirely different and much more harmful effect. It stiffens the price of land everywhere throughout the country; it leads to

speculation and stops production. In a sentence, £10,000,000 spent in land purchase has as its inevitable result widespread unemployment and £100,000,000 in doles to the idle workers.

As usual, the Cabinet is divided on the findings of their own selected advisers. Sir Eric Geddes was their man, brought forth for the job with the usual flourish of trumpets, to show the agonizing taxpayers what could and would be done to save them and their industries from destruction. The Cabinet has got more than it bargained for in this instance. Their super-man, like a modern Samson, has pulled down the building, without a doubt. It is all very interesting and amusing.

The Tories, always the stupid party, want to stand up and be counted, and their comrades in arms, the Liberal part of the Coalition, pledged to peace and retrenchment, to say nothing of reform, and with a leader whose life is dedicated to the suffering poor, are left to face the music. It means one thing and one thing certain, and that is the speedy end of this Parliament. It was begotten in passion, and the hour of its devastating existence has come to an end.

Economic justice will not be denied, and the time for playing party politics has gone for ever. The people are vested with full political rights. The machinery of voting, true enough, stands for amendment, but there is enough voting power in the hands of the people to turn down any Government that fails to keep the ship of State on an even keel. Bad trade and unemployment such as we are going through means starvation to millions of decent citizens. Hard times drive men of spirit to hard thinking, "and to give such men the right to vote and deny them the means of life is to tie firebrands to foxes' tails and let them loose in the corn."

The unrest of the day has a menacing look about it, in parts. The fog has descended upon the Welsh mountains and Old Sol is busy elsewhere. The light is seen as we emerge from the tunnel, but it is a red light. The people and the children of the people are to enter into their inheritance from on high, not to the countrysides of the land the heroes fought for, but across the seas. We are down and out. We won the war; the peace, the employment and the plenty to follow is not yet in sight. Land values, ground rents, dead rents, wayleaves and all similar methods and means of preying on industry continue and wages are down, the dole included, to subsistence level. The Geddes Committee were evidently instructed to look anywhere and everywhere for cuts into extravagance, to find out where the superfluous bureaucrats were in hiding, and in all their exploring here and there to keep their eyes off the ground.

What are the single-taxers going to do about it? Do they mean to speak out and in what way?

A Coalition Liberal M.P. said at Keighley the other day that he was in favour of some taxation of land values, but he wanted to say emphatically that he was not a single-taxer. We have heard that before and expect to hear it again. What is a single-taxer? He is one who believes that the value of land is a communal value, that it is publicly earned by the community, as a whole;

that it belongs to the people who make it, and should be taken in taxation for public purposes. The single-taxer believes that this natural fund which comes with a community and grows with its growth, were it diverted into the public purse, would enable us correspondingly to relieve industry of the burden of taxation it now unfairly carries. And further, that if this policy were adopted, tens of thousands of acres would come quickly enough into the market at reduced prices. The single tax would lower rent and raise wages.

The taxation of land values must be applied on the single-tax principle or we may look for another 1909-10 disaster. The single tax is but a name to signify an act of social justice and until it is put into practice the industry of the country must continue to bear the full weight of public burdens. The power to take land values by individuals for their own use carries with it the power to keep land out of use at fancy prices and there lies the root cause of industrial distress.

There is some sham fighting going on as to whether the Labour Party is fit to govern. The true answer is: not any more than any other Party, so long as this bottom wrong prevails. Good government we can never obtain, however the politicians may talk about it, while the communal value of land continues to be confiscated by private persons. Imperial Parliament and our great municipalities, kingdoms in themselves, have the bulk of their time taken up with questions relating to the poverty-stricken condition of the people. And what is the cause of this poverty? One thing for certain. Municipal expansion, the development of industry in all its turnings, means using additional lands and around every centre of activity there is a cast-iron girdle of land monopoly and a local assessor, by law appointed, in hot pursuit of every industrious man, ready to impose financial penalties upon him if and when he essays by his enterprise to add to the general stock of wealth. And the assessor, like the Geddes Committee, is told to leave the idler alone. The privileged idler may have a valuable, the most valuable, "property" in the town or district, but he must not be approached, nor even mentioned. He is the darling pet of the politicians and the Press. He is the owner of the land, and enterprise and industry must await his pleasure as to when and how the natural opportunities he holds shall be put at the service of industry.

That, in brief, is the case for reform, and as we think of the stagnation of trade and the slavery, the bottom cause of which stares every man in the face, we almost blush for the patience of a people who could end it with one bold stroke, and one that they are now free to deliver. In a newspaper battle with the Lord Chancellor, the Chairman of the Labour Party in Parliament, Mr. Clynes, puts the other fellow in the dock. No doubt that is where he should be, and where he is, as a member of the present Government. Lord Birkenhead wants to know if Mr. Clynes is in favour of the nationalization of industry, and Mr. Clynes puts six questions to his man, not one of them is, however it be answered, equal to the value of the paper that they are printed on. If men must have work it must be on land, or in working up the raw material

of land one way or another. And if this use of land is by law denied the worker, surely the question to be put is: Are you or are you not going to set free this God-given inheritance of the people? The nationalization of industries such as railways and mines may or may not be a wise step to take, but the wisdom of it can only be truly gauged in the absence of the more fundamental monopoly.

The taxation of land values and the untaxing of industry all round is a policy incomparably superior to all other policies in that it will open up to Labour the means of making good. All other remedies, even those advocated for temporary and immediate relief, mean money for Social Reform—the taxpayer's money, and he is not having any at this time.

In the light of the law of rent, all improvements and all progress tend to raise the value of land. It is so, naturally, quite apart from and outside of political action, and the thing to do is to take it as it appears for the benefit of the people as a whole. To propose to tax heavily a big income when it comes to light is but to warn the man of enterprise that he may as well go out of business, that we have no use for him, and notwithstanding the fine vision of a dream of the time when we shall have from each according to his abilities and give to each according to his necessities, in a society like ours the man of enterprise counts. True enough he is not infrequently to be found entrenched in monopoly, but taken out of this sphere of influence, as he can be, he has and always will have his place in any progressive community.

Let us by all means keep the Co-operative Commonwealth steadily in view, but let us try to reach a common understanding of what is wanted first to help us along this highway. The first step to genuine progress is the overthrow of land monopoly by the appropriation of the economic value of land. This is the case for the single tax, and we urge our people everywhere from now to the General Election to give time and energy and money to make the opinion that must tell for this principle in the Parliament about to be elected.

J. P.

A careful analysis of all available statistics shows that in our great basic industries the workers are unemployed for an average of at least one-fifth of the year, and that at all times during any normal year there is an army of men, who can be numbered only by hundreds of thousands, who are unable to find work or who have so far degenerated that they cannot or will not work. . . . Fundamentally this unemployment seems to rise from two great causes, although many others are contributory. First, the inequality of the distribution of income, which leaves the great masses of the population (the true ultimate consumers) unable to purchase the products of industry which they create, while a few have such a superfluity that it cannot be normally consumed but must be invested in new machinery for production or in the further monopolization of land and natural resources. . . . The second principal cause lies in the denial of access to land and natural resources even when they are unused and unproductive, except at a price and under conditions which are practically prohibitive.—*From the Report of the U.S.A. Federal Commission on Industrial Relations.*