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Editorial Offices:

94 PETTY FRANCE, LONDON, S.W.1.

All communications to be addressed to the Editor.

Telegrams: "Eulav, Sewest, London." Telephone: Victoria 4508-9.

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THE GENERAL ELECTION

"Protective tariffs are as much applications of force as are blocking squadrons, and their object is the same—to prevent trade. The difference between the two is that blockading squadrons are a means whereby nations seek to prevent their enemies from trading; protective tariffs are a means whereby nations attempt to prevent their own people from trading. What protection teaches us, is to do to ourselves in time of peace what enemies seek to do to us in time of war."

"The appointed condition of human progress is evidently that men shall come into closer relations and become more and more dependent upon each other. Thus the restrictions which protectionism urges us to impose upon ourselves are about as well calculated to promote national prosperity as ligatures, that would impede the circulation of the blood, would be to promote bodily health and comfort."

"To secure equal rights to land there is in this stage of civilization but one way. . . . That way is clear and straightforward. It consists simply in abolishing, one after another, all imposts that are in their nature really taxes, and resorting for public revenues to economic rent, or ground value."—HENRY GEORGE in *Protection or Free Trade*, Chaps. IV and XXII.

In their Manifesto to the Electors the United Committee (October, 1931) unhesitatingly affirmed that the dominating issue was Protection or Free Trade. A number of subscribers and adherents strongly objected to this rendering: They know better now. Correspondents from all parts of the globe are calling for an explanation of just what happened at the election. What happened was some sort of an avalanche of public opinion in favour of a change of Government, the impelling idea being to save a bad situation every day growing worse, in respect of employment and financial stability. That was the intention, but nature cares nothing for our intentions, good or evil; she can only judge our actions and already there are citizens by the ten thousand who realize in sackcloth and ashes that they have given their vote to make matters worse rather than better.

These ingenious persons begin to suspect they have been purposely deceived and the facts as they come to light seem to coincide with the suspicion. On the eve of the poll Mr Baldwin hotly denied that Protection was the issue; and though he is leader of a Party resolutely pledged to the Policy, it was taken for granted

that what he said on the subject could be relied upon. It was true that the ordinary Tory candidate was out full-blooded for the plunder, but, after all, what counted in the debate was the word of the leader himself! This impression swayed Liberal and Radical Free Traders to the side of the National Government.

In Mr Baldwin's own words: "The alternatives were clear beyond dispute—National Government or Socialism. Firm, honest finance, or a fatal return to squandering and borrowing. Banks where your savings are safe or banks under the control of a Socialist Government; a free hand to re-establish industry and agriculture in prosperity or the red hand of Socialism to strangle the country with taxation and State ownership. This," he added, "is the choice before the country."

Four weeks later, speaking at a Spen Valley Chamber of Commerce Dinner (Cleckheaton, 20th November), Mr Baldwin said: "In the steel trade I feel confident before long, and especially when we have tariffs in this country, we shall move on to this kind of situation, when the steel trade will be internationally controlled and the world will be parcelled out and the markets will be made secure. The opportunity is at last coming; let us embrace it." So much for the Tory leader.

The Prime Minister, his companion in arms throughout the contest, said in his closing election speech: "The National Government simply says it will have an open mind on every practical or reasonable proposal brought forward, including tariffs. I am not going to be run by any Party. I am going to inquire into the matter of tariffs with an absolutely open mind. If there is going to be any partizan manoeuvring, then I am not their man."

The scene changes, and in the House of Commons, 16th November, the Liberal Free Trade member of the Government, Mr Runciman, explains the scope and purpose of its first essay in tariff reform. Here it is in a sentence, set in black type by the Tory press: "The Board of Trade can issue an Order which will impose on all articles to which the Act applies a duty not exceeding 100 per cent of the value of the article."

In his speech the President of the Board of Trade stops to assure Mr Amery, the Protectionist leader, that the Government "meant to deal with these practical questions as and when they came up with the greatest rapidity." The Prime Minister's "open mind inquiry" has been rapidly enough manoeuvred out of position.

Mr MacDonald himself, in reply to a question by Mr Maxton, 26th November, on the very great change in the Government's programme, answered: "What has occurred is this—the Government before rising want to get on with certain action; it was for that purpose the Government was returned. It was for that purpose also that the Government called the House together so quickly after the election." The statement was received with Tory cheers; and renewed cheers. They are ringing the bells to-day; to-morrow they will be wringing their hands!

We have neither the time nor the space to quote at length from Mr Runciman's speech when he announced his "Abnormal Importations (Customs Duties) Bill." It is the beginning of Protection that, as one of its leading Press exponents explains, has "hit the North of France as well as the South of Wales." It has come to pass that the foreigner does not pay the whole, he only pays half, and "the long era of British impotence is over." As Mr Runciman said in the debate: "We were claiming in this country the same freedom in regard to our trading and fiscal system as was enjoyed by every other country." Translated into plain English this means that because other Governments allow their citizens to be "robbed, bamboozled and

cheated" by tariff exactions we must see to it that our Government does the same to its own people!

We have been told with much insistence of the rascalities of this election. We have heard it all before. There never was a General Election in our day that did not carry with it a due proportion of the rascalities that seem to be incident to the making of a Parliament, or for that matter, to the making of a Town or a County Council. No doubt the abuses this time were specially bad, in some respects; but however this chanced, it cannot by itself account for the revolution at the polls. As Mr Baldwin said in his best Parliamentary style, 13th November: "I have been beaten many times but I have never attributed any reason for the defeat except that the country was sick of us and that was why we were beaten." Confession is good for the soul.

The country, we are given to understand, is seeking a way out of its economic and financial troubles. This only means that our Parliamentarians are so engaged: they have been at it for a decade or more in conjunction with business men, bankers, and no end of economic advisors, but without any success. Indeed, it can be truly said that our elected persons, voted into office at five different General Elections, with their most approved staff of experts, paid and unpaid, have done nothing but swim with the tide of adversity.

The War was blamed, and continues to be blamed, for the great upset that brought so much grief and pain not only to this country, but to all Europe and to countries further afield. But the War with all its economic drawbacks has long since passed into history. If people to-day are without food that is in abundance, and are without necessary clothing and shelter that available industry and skill can supply, how can the War that came to an end thirteen years ago be held responsible? The War carried its own devastation and when it ended brought to society more than one cargo of dead sea fruit. But it could neither close nor narrow the opportunities Nature offers to any kind of enterprise.

World causes, we are unceasingly advised, account for the social distress that the War in the first instance brought about. But what is the meaning of this hard-worked term "world causes"? Does it mean that we cannot go to work without the sanction of some other country or Government? The simple truth is that we can solve our own internal problems and other countries theirs without fear of any outside interference. The sun shines, the rain falls, the seasons come and go, in all lands, without any serious interruption. Yet the stern facts are that masses of men and women are without employment and that debt and desolation threaten the very existence of our civilization.

The tariff walls that obstruct and interfere with trade are fashioned out of land monopoly. This is the all-powerful interest in every land that denies access to natural opportunities, and until it is exposed as the chief obstacle to prosperity, trade will languish and poverty keep pace with progress. The remedy for this obstruction is very well known, but it is not allowed by the powers that be to enter into the great debate. As Henry George has declared and fully explained, land monopoly would be destroyed once and for all if the taxation of land values could be applied so to make it unprofitable to hold land out of use. It is this radical step that is urgent and until it is taken the principle of free trade cannot find its fullest expression.

We are told by some radical authorities it is a financial problem that is the main cause of all the mischief and that until the ordinary man, worker and business man alike, understands the money question there is little or no hope of trade and commerce emerging from the chaos into which it has fallen. Yet it is apparent

that the mazes of the money question cannot be a vital matter to the ordinary man in search of an opportunity to earn a living. He knows, and when he does not know he ought to be shown, that his living depends not upon money, but upon access to land. Millions have lived and died and millions more will follow on who never could grasp the complications of finance in all its ramifications; but the land question and its bearing on the ordinary man's life and work is not difficult to understand. To drop the land question for the money question is to drop the substance for the shadow.

The man at the gate fixes the wage of the man inside and the man at the gate is placed in position not by the money changers at the banks, or wherever they are to be found, but by the monopoly that prevents him going to work on his own account. If the land were opened up by the taxation of land values alternative employment would be provided and wages would rise accordingly. This is what land free from monopoly can do to better the condition of the people. What can money do? Buy land to stiffen the monopoly! The taxation of land means the open door for labour; land purchase means the lock-out of labour. The Governments since the War have taken hundreds of millions of pounds from the taxpayer for their reconstruction and unemployment schemes. These projects have but added to the strength of the disorder, by obstructing municipal and national expansion from end to end of the country. It is written that as ye sow so shall ye reap.

There are many minor reasons given with more or less truth for the fall of the Labour Government in October, but the principal reason was their utter failure to cope successfully with the underlying causes of industrial and commercial decline. The Party came into power two and a half years ago boldly proclaiming their firm resolution to solve the unemployed problem. Innocent of economic law, they believed they had the cure; but the problem only grew worse in their hands. That is the reason why they were reduced to impotence at the polls. There is no other reason.

The time has come for government to free industry from the bondage of land monopoly or the monopoly will put an end to government as we know it. In a very real sense trade is civilization. It takes men out of narrow grooves and brings them together to advance along the higher walks in life. Free trade but means the freedom to take this action, freedom to cultivate the paths to greater freedom and higher happiness. Protection is a policy that prevents this attainment and therefore it stands condemned.

The land value policy can bring the breath of life into the free trade principle: The thought must and will prevail.

J. P.

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