

## LAND & LIBERTY

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## THE GENERAL ELECTION

### The Party Manifestoes

Take, for instance, Protectionism. What support it has beyond the mere selfish desire of sellers to compel buyers to pay them more than their goods are worth, springs from such superficial ideas as that production, not consumption, is the end of effort, that money is more valuable than money's worth, and to sell more profitable than to buy; and above all, from a desire to limit competition, springing from an unanalyzing recognition of the phenomena that necessarily follow when men who have the need to labour are deprived by monopoly of access to the natural and indispensable element of all labour. Its methods involve the idea that Governments can more wisely direct the expenditure of labour and the investment of capital than can labourers and capitalists, and that the men who control Governments will use this power for the general good and not in their own interests. They tend to multiply officials, restrict liberty, invent crimes. They promote perjury, fraud, and corruption. And they would, were the theory carried to its logical conclusion, destroy civilization and reduce mankind to savagery.—THE CONDITION OF LABOUR, by Henry George.

The tranquillity Government elected a year ago has come to an untimely end and the tranquillity is far to seek. As we said at the time, representing as it did only 5,500,000 of the 14,500,000 votes polled, it had no moral sanction for its existence. The Government was installed a year ago because of an out of date system of voting and it went to pieces through a sharp attack of sheer imbecility. The Prime Minister, Mr. Baldwin, in his address to the Electors last month, says the solution of the unemployed problem is the key to every necessary social reform, and he appears honestly to believe he has this key in restricting the import of foreign manufactured goods, supplemented by a bounty of £1 an acre on all agricultural holdings of arable land exceeding one acre. In other words, the issue of the election to be decided on the 6th December is Free Trade (limited) versus Protection, accompanied by the promise of another subsidy to the landlords. Like the Agricultural Rates Act passed last session the promised £1 an acre is for the benefit of the farmer and the labourer, but these two ought to know by this time how this dole, like all others, will percolate in due time into the pockets of their lord and master, the landowner.

As we write, the contest is in progress with some 1,446 candidates for the 615 seats. Manifestoes have been issued by the various Parties and the din of battle is heard in every constituency. A principal feature of the event is the unity of the Liberal Party. What the divided Liberals could

not do for themselves, Mr. Baldwin, honest man, has done for them. The Liberal Manifesto was signed jointly by Mr. Asquith and Mr. Lloyd George, and since then they have appeared on the same platform, at Paisley. It has been an unique and wonderful reconciliation, but that is altogether a Liberal affair.

The danger of the country passing over to Protection is not to be minimized; and it is to the credit of the Labour Party that they have once again firmly pledged themselves to oppose Protection with all the strength at their command.

So much for the principal issue at stake. What about the positive policy in relief of industrial distress? Neither of the advanced parties, Liberal or Labour, look to complete Free Trade, freedom to produce as well as to exchange, as a solution of the unemployed problem. While holding to our fiscal system they admit and cry out that the Free Trade we enjoy is not enough and in this dilemma advance their special cures for poverty. In a general survey they lament the condition of affairs in Europe, blaming the Versailles treaty, reparations and debts, and look for a settlement that would restore so much confidence and thereby quicken trade into normal pre-war conditions. But all that is recognized to be insufficient, hence the need for a home policy.

Before the war there were slums, unemployment and millions of people always on the verge of starvation, and policies were put forward in the political manifestoes of the time, dealing with land, housing and better social conditions all round.

And what a change from 1906 to 1923 has come over the Liberal programme! Seventeen years ago Campbell-Bannerman led his forces out to battle under the banner of Free Trade and radical land reform. "We must not leave the land monopoly untouched," he declared, "our present land laws cause a greater drag upon trade and are a greater peril to the standard of living than all the tariffs of Germany, and America, and even of our own Colonies." He argued the case for the Taxation of Land Values and the untaxing of industry and pledged his party to immediate reform on these lines. How he maintained and advocated the reform to his dying day the Liberal Party can tell.

Again, in 1909, the Party fought and won on that battleground. The story then was, in the Budget campaign literature, countersigned by Mr. Lloyd George: "The land question lies at the root of social and economic questions with which the Government is pledged to deal. The land question cannot be solved, indeed no real approach can be made towards its solution, without a national record of true land value, and the levy of taxation on that value. The Taxation of Land Values will secure for the public a part of those values which the public itself creates. But it will do much more. It will bring an extension of freedom, freedom to produce as well as to exchange, an elimination of those conditions which at present restrict the opportunities to work."

To-day the Liberal Manifesto strikes a different and an opposing note. Instead of the Taxation of Land Values to widen opportunities, we are given to understand that Liberal land reform is now the Tory policy of land purchase for the

country, and for the towns leasehold enfranchisement and the partial rating of land values. What a humiliation. As the Tory DAILY TELEGRAPH, 23rd November, says:—

"The most surprising thing of all in this Liberal programme is the statement that 'opportunity should be given for the cultivator to become the owner of his own land on reasonable terms by a system of land purchase, because a free man on his own land, whether as farmer or freeholder, has always proved the most energetic and successful of producers.' We quite agree, but since when did this become Liberal doctrine? It has been the policy of Unionists and Conservatives for two generations, but for twenty years it has been just as consistently opposed by Liberals. Both parties have passed Smallholdings Acts, but the broad distinction between Liberal and Conservative measures has always been that the latter advocated purchase and ownership and the former sought to improve the position of the tenants as tenants. Why, then, this suspiciously sudden change of front?"

It is for the National Liberal Federations of England and Scotland to meet and cope with such apostasy. They know what they have said on the subject these past twelve months, to say nothing of the past thirty years. They have Mr. Asquith's Paisley policy and his platform utterances of but yesterday to guide them to an honest verdict on this betrayal. On the Taxation of Land Values the Liberals have said: give us another chance; 1909 was after all an experiment, we know better now, and here in our informing literature, issued by Liberal headquarters, and in Mr. Asquith's mature consideration and judgment, you have the Party pledged to the principle and policy of taxing land values as never before.

What do they think of the position now, and what is to be said to the man on the brink of leaving the Party who insists that, no matter what the official and district Liberals say, the Liberal leaders cannot be trusted? It is apparent that the Liberal leaders and the powerful interests in the Party, who behind the scenes will not have the reform, are determined to drive this man (his name is legion) into the Labour ranks. "That's all very well for you," said an angry listener the other night to a Liberal speaker who was urging the Taxation of Land Values, "but can you take your party leaders with you?"

Just four months ago the Liberals announced an autumn campaign with Taxation of Land Values as one of the chief points on the programme. Mr. Asquith, Sir Donald Maclean, Mr. Vivian Phillips (the Liberal whip), Lord Beauchamp, Sir John Simon and hundreds of speakers were let loose on this educational publicity campaign. The WESTMINSTER GAZETTE (31st July) featured the new crusade in bold type as follows:—

Reaching the Roots of Unemployment. The Land Question will be one of the most prominent features of the campaign and a COMPLETE AND EFFECTIVE VALUATION OF THE LAND; THE TRANSFER OF RATES FROM BUSINESS ENTERPRISE TO LAND VALUE; THE TAXATION OF LAND VALUES WITH A VIEW TO THE BEST USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES.

The Liberal plan is to attack the system, because at so many points the Land Monopoly penalizes and restricts enterprise and so closes the door to many new developments of industry that would absorb the labour of a great number of the unemployed;

and so on, linking up the Taxation of Land Values with Free Trade, Peace and Reconstruction in Europe. Since the Election was announced, this Liberal daily has been completely and effectively silenced. Never a word on the Taxation of Land Values appears in its columns.

When the Liberals set out boldly to advocate the reform, Liberal unity was not by any means a prime consideration. At that time Mr. Asquith (Bournemouth, 4th May, 1923) was denouncing National Liberals for voting against Col. Wedgwood's Bill on the Rating of Land Values, affirming at the same time that the true Liberal principle in the case of land monopoly was the Taxation and Rating of Land Values. A month later at Buxton (1st June) Mr. Asquith again urged the case for the reform. "It does not," he said, "involve a new or additional burden on industry but it would produce these two consequences—first of all, that we should cease to be imposing a burden on enterprise and industry; and next, that the land would come more readily and cheaply into the best use for which it is fitted. These two things would be two potent promoters of industry and progress." And yet again, at Paisley (7th June): "There is one topic which in a sense may be said to dominate the whole of the separate compartments in the field of industrial policy—I mean the Taxation of Land Values. Until we have a parliament and a government that is courageous enough and far-sighted enough to grapple with that problem, grapple with it whole-heartedly, drastically and without injustice to any human being, you will find you are constantly brought up, as it were, against a stone wall, a bar to progress in every sphere of social reform." Once more, on 27th September, at the National Liberal Club, in opening the autumn campaign, Mr. Asquith declared: "The better the land is used, the more valuable the improvement made upon it, the more heavily it is rated and taxed, and the more it has to pay in contributions to the State. On the other hand, if land is kept out of use, or if it is inadequately developed, those interested in it are let off lightly. You cannot have a more effective way of handicapping industry and discouraging enterprise. Our desire is to transfer part of the existing burden to the unimproved value of land." He emphasized these three main points: (1) Better conduct of foreign affairs; (2) Free Trade; (3) Taxation of Land Values. The representative audience cheered their leader, especially when he came to the third plank in the programme.

There in those clear statements is the formidable indictment of land monopoly by the Liberal leader and the means he would employ to break down its stone wall. Yet in the Liberal Manifesto this same man says that Liberal land policy is now, in four short months, changed into the purchase of land at the public expense. Yesterday the Liberal land policy was Taxation of Land Values to bring it cheaply into use to the advantage of industry and employment. To-day it is a scheme that would stiffen the price against industry, harden the monopoly and so make employment more difficult to seek and obtain.

Could there be in our politics a more glaring example of barefaced hypocrisy, or a greater instance of how the Liberal party has lost so much



of the fortified ground it once occupied? We confess to being quite unable to do justice to this treachery. Three years ago the mill girls of Paisley were promised something out of land values, by Mr. Asquith. He got their votes on that understanding. To-day he has the temerity to face them and declare, in effect, that while they have got nothing since from that source of revenue, he is now pledged to take something from them as taxpayers to hand over to the "distressed" land monopolist. The new cry is: Your trade and your prosperity is threatened, and under cover of this threat, he proclaims a policy which according to his own previous view of the matter can only narrow the opportunities to employment and thus make the lot of the worker still more difficult to endure.

Is the Liberal idea now to tax Land Values, not in substitution of existing burdens, but to buy land from the territorial landlords and so raise the price against the cultivator of the soil? It is on record that such a policy has been the curse of Australia and New Zealand, and incidentally, the downfall of the Liberal Parties in those Dominions.

Since this Liberal land purchase Manifesto was issued we have had indignant protests from Liberal candidates and their supporters from north and south of the country stating they have had no act or part in this betrayal, that they will have nothing to do with land purchase, that they will vote against any measure of the kind, and pledging themselves to work all the more strenuously for the Taxation of Land Values. The Manifesto, they say, was sprung upon them in a night and when they were facing the enemy. They could do nothing in the circumstances but carry on, the main and dominant issue being what it was.

Apart from the Capital Levy which still hangs round the neck of the Labour Party, a handicap to their prospects as it is a menace to industrial and social progress, the Labour Manifesto is more in keeping with the Land Value policy. They may yet realize that the Taxation of Land Values is the only "capital levy" that is required to promote production and raise wages. In their promise to re-equip the Land Valuation Department and tax land values in lieu of the existing food taxes the Labour Manifesto points the way to complete Free Trade. As the MANCHESTER GUARDIAN (19th November) puts it: "in this they are taking up the question where the Liberals have left it."

This Liberal *volte face* from Land Values Taxation to the reactionary scheme of land purchase leaves the field open to the Labour Party, and we trust they will make the most of it. What we want is the policy, and if the Labour Party can help to promote it so much the better for the co-operative commonwealth they have in view. Meanwhile the election is at hand, and in the words of the Manifesto of the United Committee: We hold to the principle of complete Free Trade, freedom to produce as well as freedom to exchange; we call on the millions of voters who believe in the Taxation of Land Values as an instrument to free industry and enterprise from the fetters of monopoly, promote the best use of land, and open new opportunities to trade and employment, to give their voice and their vote only to candidates who stand for this liberating policy. Pledge your candidate to the Taxation of Land Values and against land purchase.

J. P.

## JOHN HARDHEAD'S QUESTION

'Twas at a public meeting,  
Where Blanksby lectured,  
John Hardhead raised a question,  
And this was what he said:  
"You talk of unemployment;  
The remedy's at call—  
Reduce the population  
And there'll be work for all."

Him Blanksby answered, smiling:  
"Three hundred years ago  
We had in this same country,  
As very well you know,  
A smaller population—  
Not one where now are three;  
Yet workmen lacked employment,  
And food, too, frequently."

"And next, my friend, with England,  
The Emerald Isle compare,  
The population's smaller,  
Proportionately, there;  
They've fewer folk per acre,  
Yet Malthus they defy,  
For the devil a hungrier people  
Exists beneath the sky."

"Now, doubtless, you'll acknowledge  
That all we wear and eat—  
The beef and the potatoes,  
The malt and wool and wheat;  
Steel, iron, bricks, and mortar,  
Wool, leather, and what not,  
Coal, gas, and all things needful,  
Must from the land be got."

"So, give me your attention;  
Observe this table well;  
Imagine it's a country  
Where just two persons dwell;  
Say, Britain, fair and fertile,  
Well stocked with beasts and plants,  
And the population dwindled  
To two inhabitants."

"The first, my Lord DeCanter—  
This bottle shall he be—  
A proud and portly person  
Of ancient pedigree;  
He owns the whole of England,  
Its rivers, hills, and dales,  
Likewise the whole of Scotland,  
Likewise the whole of Wales."

"Next comes poor Tommy Tumbler—  
The glass may stand for him—  
A humble British labourer  
Whose ancestry is dim.  
Tom Tumbler, though an honest man,  
And skilful at his trade,  
Owns neither land nor anything,  
Except himself and spade."

"Recall what I just told you,  
That all we wear and eat,  
The beef and the potatoes,  
The malt and wool and wheat;  
Steel, iron, bricks, and mortar,  
Wood, leather, and what not,  
Coal, gas, and all things needful,  
MUST FROM THE LAND BE GOT."