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THE GENERAL STRIKE

There is a growing unrest and bitterness among the masses, whatever be the form of government, a blind groping for escape from conditions becoming intolerable. To attribute all this to the teachings of demagogues is like attributing the fever to the quickened pulse. It is the new wine beginning to ferment in old bottles. To put into a sailing-ship the powerful engines of a first-class ocean steamer would be to tear her to pieces with their play. So the new powers rapidly changing all the relations of society must shatter social and political organizations not adapted to meet their strain.

To adjust our institutions to growing needs and changing conditions is the task which devolves upon us. Prudence, patriotism, human sympathy, and religious sentiment, alike call upon us to undertake it. There is danger in reckless change; but greater danger in blind conservatism. The problems beginning to confront us are grave—so grave that there is fear they may not be solved in time to prevent great catastrophies. But their gravity comes from indisposition to recognize frankly and grapple boldly with them.

These dangers, which menace not one country alone, but modern civilisation itself, do but show that a higher civilisation is struggling to be born—that the needs and the aspirations of men have outgrown conditions and institutions that before sufficed. Henry George, in SOCIAL PROBLEMS. Chap. 1.

The general strike has come and gone and except for a fresh consignment of irritations dumped into the machinery of politics and industry things remain as before. As yet there is no sign of the just and lasting settlement of the trouble in the coal fields, promised by Mr. Baldwin when, with a sigh of relief, he thanked God for the decision of the Trades Union Congress Committee to call off the great assault. The miners' strike is a hurt to the coal industry, as to all industry, and while it lasts the community as a whole suffers. Every other person prays for an early accommodation between the miners and the mineowners; newspaper editorials urge the Prime Minister to take the matter in hand, one way and another; but the Cabinet, in blind Conservatism, continues to play a waiting game, waiting for something to turn up while the industries of the country take on a feeling of creeping paralysis.

The general strike was in essence a threat to the community, and while it lasted it was something of a nightmare. Labour leaders claim the strike as a demonstration of solidarity on the part of millions of workers in support of their standard of life. Those outside this purview, including not a few millions of other workers, seem rather to take the experience as proving how firmly our system of democracy is rooted in established law and order. But what anyone got out of it worth having is hard to tell. It was evidently a victory all round; another like it and God help the State!

There is universal sympathy with the miners in their desperate struggle to resist, even to the point of starvation, any attempt to invade their standard of living, but to think of helping them with a general strike was surely the very essence of madness. With an overcrowded labour market embracing a million unemployed, there has been nothing like it since Don Quixote charged the two flocks of innocent sheep taking them to be vast armies met to engage in deadly combat. The Knight of the Dismal Figure, so the story goes, felt certain that whatever side he favoured with his assistance was bound to win. When it was all over and he recovered his speech, if not his senses, Don Quixote attributed his defeat to necromancers that, for purposes of their own, change the shapes of things. What black art was it that tempted the Mandarins of the Trades Union Congress to take their own kith and kin for a community of sheep? It is said that Cervantes in his great classic destroyed for ever the fanciful trade of knight-errantry. Let us devoutly hope that this 1926 fiasco will demonstrate for ever the folly and the futility of a general strike in any country where parliamentary representation is not wanting.

It is said by labour leaders that the general strike had no political significance. But if that claim is to be made good, what becomes of the position and prospects of the Parliamentary Labour Party? It is the very mouthpiece of the Trade Union movement, and was fashioned by organized labour for that purpose. In his letter to the Labour candidate at the North Hammersmith by-election Mr. Ramsay MacDonald (LABOUR PRESS SERVICE, 27th May) calls for additional strength in Parliament, and he tells the workers that "the more wisely they resort to political action the less need there will be for embarking on industrial action." The general strike was manifestly intended to compel the Government to do the bidding of the Trades Union Labour Party, and if it was not so designed, will someone concerned tell us what was the intention? Whatever it was, those responsible for it now know to their cost that not that way lies the approach to the celestial city. A general strike is not in the evolution towards a better state of things. It is not a departure that speaks for growth and development. It is war, a direct challenge to peaceful ends with nothing to commend it, except as a short cut to disaster all round, and thence to dictatorship.

When the working classes were out for the right to vote the Liberal Party knew how to advance the cause of freedom and fair play. Those were the days of militant and triumphant Liberalism. But when there came to society a new interpretation of the underlying laws of social progress the Liberal

Party stumbled and fell. It was provided with a set of Fabian platitudes which somehow were adopted as the modern expression of Liberal principles. Had its leaders and its press resolved to translate their political convictions on the land question into terms of economic justice there never would have been a Labour Party; there would have been no need for it. The rise and progress of the Labour Party can be justly attributed to the failure of the Liberals to see in the Taxation of Land Values a potent promoter of industry and progress. The Liberal Party have always been in sympathy with the under-dog, but that is not enough. As Professor Gunnison Brown says in the LIBERTARIAN, November, 1925: "Liberalism needs more than sympathetic hearts. It needs, as well, economic intelligence. Without the aid of such intelligence it is likely to be found flirting with the ideals of Communism and pluming itself that it is thereby serving the common welfare."

The fruit of our political progress was won from hard enough soil, and the harvest came in season. But the time arrived when the prevailing distribution of wealth came under review, and inquiry revealed the truth that the franchise, however democratic, could do nothing by itself to benefit labour in any real or durable manner. It was the new idea that challenged "institutions that had long been deemed wise and just" and, as usual, it met with the bitter opposition of the classes that profit most by social injustice. But the facts were in agreement with the philosophy. The growing discontent of the workers was fully justified, and, to the credit of the race, many placed above the struggle were found to be not without sympathy and indignation.

The old-time belief in politics, the belief that everything possible was being done to rescue the working people from the hell of poverty, was rudely shaken. Their eternal lot, hard work and hard times, in a society teeming with abundance was the problem to be solved. There was a maldistribution of wealth and influence and the wrong was unerringly traced to the law and practice that made private property of Nature's storehouse. As Henry George put it in his great Inquiry: "To see human beings in the most abject, the most hopeless and helpless condition, you must go not to the unfenced prairies and log cabins of new clearings in the backwoods, where man single-handed is commencing the struggle with Nature and land is yet worth nothing, but to great cities where the ownership of a little patch of ground is a great fortune." This searching statement was in the nature of a leading question, and the argument it provoked is still heard in the Senate and outside in all discussion that bears on taxation, industry and commerce. When there is much production and labour and capital are hard pressed to make ends meet, it can be safely reasoned that someone else is having the benefit, and that someone else is land monopoly. If the fruits of invention, the subdivision of labour and all efficiency go neither to Labour nor to Capital it follows that these favours disappear in land values, if the factors in the production of wealth are Land, Labour and Capital.

As the sun is the source of all life, so is land the source of all wealth, yet when the call is for a square deal all round the statisticians in the Press and their co-partners on the platform at once reply that if all the wealth in existence was to be evenly distributed it could not amount to more than half-a-crown, or at most five shillings a week extra to any man or woman. The answer to this lean contention is that it begs the question at issue, in its assumption that wealth actual also stands for wealth potential. It will not do to ignore the plain truth that by uniting idle hands to idle land the existing wealth of this year, and next, can be considerably augmented and would be were the economic obstacles to this union overthrown.

The Taxation of Land Values will in its incidence make land speculation an unprofitable calling, and until this is accomplished every other genuine reform is threatened from its very inception. Any reform that fails to cut into land monopoly can only work for higher land prices and lower wages. The Taxation of Land Values is a step that involves no drastic revision or attack on the Constitution. It is the substance and not the shadow of improvement. It takes from no one what is his by right, not even from the land speculator; it merely prevents him from taking from others what belongs to them, and to the commonweal. In practice it is the undoing of a wrong, and not the assertion of any new ethical claim as most reforms pretend to be. It reaches a source of public revenue that in the nature of things is earmarked for public purposes and never could be intended for any man's private purse. It is in close and friendly correspondence with municipal expansion, and it goes forward hand in hand with the liberal principle of free trade.

Twenty-five years ago the great municipalities of the country gladly carried the question of Taxing Land Values to Parliament as a reform that would lighten their burden and relieve them of difficulties and anxieties. They agreed with Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman that there was an iron girdle of land monopoly round their towns, and that if overcrowding was to cease the open fields on every hand must be brought under tribute. The Liberal Party took the matter in hand and promised there would be no half-hearted measures, no piecemeal instalment of this reform. How the municipalities were betrayed and their legitimate expectations of relief shattered beyond repair is one of the saddest chapters in the history of the Liberal Party.

In those promising days the leaders of the party spoke out in no uncertain mood. To take one, the first that comes to hand, Lord Grey of Fallodon. He gave it as his opinion that "the party which first masters that question (the Taxation of Land Values), which first makes it its own, which can show it is really capable of dealing with it, and is not going to let itself be hampered by vested interests from exercising its intelligence upon it freely—that party will have a great and solid ground upon which to appeal to the country." It is in the chronicles how the Liberals took possession of this "solid ground," and how the vested interests and the vested prejudices forced them to abandon it.

Something had to be done, and an alternative programme was adopted which, at best, in the words of one of their ablest journalists, could only function as a pacemaker for Socialism. The term Socialism, as meaning co-operative development on a grand scale, may be taken, with qualifications, as Liberalism writ large, but in that event the need for a distinct and separate Liberal Party is hardly a case to be argued.

In playing with the Taxation of Land Values, as it has done, and in yielding to the vested interests, the Liberal Party has suffered more than it cares to admit. Even now its leaders and foremost spokesmen pay little heed to the question that in 1906 and again in 1909? restored the fortunes of the party and provided it with the "solid ground" upon which to operate for the good of the country and its own permanence. Instead of the need for the land reform that will promote industry and progress we are now given to understand that what is urgent is skill, energy and enterprise on the part of captains of industry; the efficiency of the British workman and goodwill between the two, to be followed by some sort of complete partnership in industry. That is now the Liberal doctrine, according to Lord Grey of Fallodon, in a speech at the National Liberal Club, 29th May. It takes no note of the land question, although the exactions of land monopoly on industry and enterprise are as vicious as when the speaker unsparingly denounced it and called upon his public to face up to the iniquity with courage and high endeavour.

We are not here seeking to establish a claim that the reform we advocate is everything, or that it is even a substitute for other big and immediate reforms. But we do contend that were it the law of the land it would help as no other single reform could help to steady the thought that keeps pace with the higher civilization struggling to be born. If we would help in this new birth the steps taken must be in keeping with economic law and experience. We must travel that way or towards some reckless change; there is no hope in standing still or in turning back to former adjustments.

The general strike was more than a demonstration of sympathy with the miners. It was a protest against any lowering of the standard of living in every department of industry. Bad trade worsens the condition of labour; the jobless man fixes the wages of those in employment. If miners could find openings in other industries there would be no miners' strike against lower wages and longer hours. The daily habit of pleading with Capital and Labour to get together in amity and peace takes us nowhere. In the light of revealed economic truth material progress is expressed in terms of higher land values and lower wages. The Taxation of Land Values will correct this abuse. It will raise wages at the expense of land monopoly, and in opening up new avenues to production it will give Labour the chance to help and not hinder in the progress towards the ideal State.

J. P.

GRANTS-IN-AID AND LANDLORD BENEFIT

The Minister of Health, Mr. N. Chamberlain, in answer to a question in the House of Commons, on 22nd April, stated that the rateable value of agricultural land in England and Wales at the beginning of the financial years 1913-14 and 1924-25 and the estimated amount of local rates levied on agricultural land were as follows:—

	England and Wales	
	1913-14.	1924-25.
Rateable value ..	£23,992,600	£25,923,167
Local rates levied	£3,300,000	£3,830,000

The Secretary of State for Scotland, Sir John Gilmour, on 27th April, gave the corresponding information for Scotland:—

	Scotland	
	1913-14.	1924-25.
Gross rental ..	£5,700,000	£5,663,958
Local rates levied	£900,000	£1,260,000

It appears from these figures that the average rate in the £ on agricultural land in England and Wales was 2s. 9d. in the £ in 1913-14 and 2s. 11d. in 1924-25, a difference of 2d. in the £. In Scotland the averages work out at 3s. 2d. in the £ in 1913-14 and 4s. 5d. in 1924-25, a difference of 1s. 3d. in the £.

In virtue of the Agricultural Rates Acts, agricultural land with its improvements other than farm buildings and farm houses is charged with one-quarter of the rate in the £ levied on other properties. This explains the *total* average rate of 2s. 11d. in England and Wales and 4s. 5d. in Scotland. The burden has been lifted from agricultural land by the vicious and disastrous policy of transferring the burden to other trades and industries and to the improvements on land used for other purposes than agriculture. In the result the total amount of local revenues received in Great Britain from land rated as "agricultural" (with the improvements named) is the ridiculous sum of £5,090,000. By provisions of the new Rating and Valuation Act, the process of relief—at the expense of other ratepayers and taxpayers—is carried farther; after 1st April, 1927, farm buildings, other than farm houses, will be charged with only one-quarter of the rates otherwise payable.

All these reliefs by grants and subsidies are wholly for the benefit of the landowner and not at all for the benefit of agriculture. Last month we published returns showing for England and Wales that if the Agricultural Rates Acts had not been passed "agricultural land" as rateable subject would have contributed £11,830,000 to the local revenues in 1924-25, whereas it actually contributed only £3,830,000. The difference of £8,000,000 a year is so much saved not to agriculture but to the owners of agricultural land in England and Wales. Being capitalized it is equivalent to a gift of £160,000,000 to them, for as is universally admitted the reduction in the local taxation payable by the occupier *and unaccompanied by any tax on land values* has but added to the value of the land. It is a policy that has done enormous harm not only to agriculture, but to all industries by fostering land speculation and preventing access to land for the expansion of cities, towns and villages and new enterprise of every description. The remedy is obvious. We must break through this ring of monopoly by the Taxation of Land Values and in relieving improvements from taxation, devote the value of the land, which belongs to the community, to the uses of the community.

A. W. M.