

LAND & LIBERTY

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HOUSING AND AGRICULTURE

The new Housing Policy of the Government is now revealed and its provisions are being debated in the House of Commons and throughout the country. The small amount of the subsidy and a fierce criticism of the "non-parlour" type of house excite the wrath of the housing reformer in all circles. But never a word comes from the mouth of any authority or high-placed politician as to the underlying wrong done to the building trade in the land system and the method of raising rates and taxes at the expense of the improver. And when anything is said, such as the examples given by Bailie Burt at the Glasgow Town Council debate (see page 85), the Press has no room for such revelations, no room for the concrete proof that there is something wrong at the beginning, something that could be put right without delay.

The house builder cannot make good because of the monopoly of the land everywhere apparent; and to get over the difficulty the wise men of the State (save the mark!) can do no better than levy upon the earnings of industry to feed the monster that is the direct cause of the iniquity.

Subsidies are the order of the day, and subsidies mean grants in aid of privileged and legalized incompetence: it is the policy of the Liberal, Conservative and Labour parties.

Prior to the general election Mr. Asquith appointed a small Committee of Liberal M.P.'s to consider and report on a Liberal housing scheme. The Committee called for evidence from various sources and the case for the Rating of Land Values and the unrating of houses, especially in the light of the very latest information on the subject, was submitted. The report of this Committee now published in the Liberal Press with Mr. Asquith's approval is quite in harmony with the fecklessness of official Liberalism. The Liberal leaders have agreed that in the matter of housing Taxation of Land Values shall remain in the background. They are for the policy in the abstract, but it cannot and must not be related to any concrete measure dealing with housing or unemployment. Subsidies are in demand and Liberalism must accommodate itself to what appears to be the drift of opinion. Land monopoly must be subdued by yielding to its terms, with, of course, the usual reference to "a number of drastic measures of a more permanent character," later on.

The nearest approach to the Rating of Land Values in this Liberal housing report reads: "Such amendment of the rating laws as is necessary to ensure the fair incidence of local taxation." What a nice sweet morsel for the Whig Liberal who does not like

to see the Taxation of Land Values in the Liberal programme, but what a rebuff to the rank and file, and to the officials of the Liberal Publication Department who honestly believe in the reform, and who are permitted to prepare and issue the popular leaflets boldly advocating the plain policy, when an election is at hand!

The report with its naked and unashamed confession that there is no distinct Liberal housing policy tells the Liberals in effect to shout with the biggest mob, the mob who are out to bleed the general taxpayer for the benefit of the land speculator and the associated rings round the house, the mob who are out to give a final blow to private enterprise in the building trade.

In cunning childish ways in Liberal clubs and quiet corners the word is passed round that the Taxation of Land Values cannot be put through at this time, that its votaries should recognize this obvious truth and play the game accordingly. It is a comforting and well-placed sentiment suitable for a parlour meeting but not for the inclement weather outside. It will cut no ice for progressive Liberalism. It was not in these faltering, shamefaced ways that Campbell-Bannerman raised the standard of land reform twenty years ago, when the Liberal Imperialists had brought the party to the low ground it then occupied. Let us strike at land monopoly by the Taxation of Land Values and in this way solve the housing problem was C.-B.'s clarion call; and twenty years after, when the badly housed and unemployed cry out with greater bitterness and with more knowledge of what is wanted, the very name of the policy is hidden from sight in this measured and calculated Liberal housing document.

The Taxation of Land Values would bring instant relief to the building trade and to its unemployed workers. It would do this by the simple process of compelling owners of land to make a contribution to the public revenues according to the value of the opportunities they hold in the land. That was the Liberal declaration at three general elections in 1906, and again in 1910. The people were told it was a reform that was long overdue and that the Liberals were resolved, as they were pledged up to the hilt, to make it the law of the land. Mr. Asquith himself in 1906 publicly promised the Municipalities that an approved measure for the rating of land values would be put forward, and not any piecemeal instalment of the reform. Nothing was put forward but a set of make-belief propositions that brought the movement a measure of disaster which not even the war could obliterate. And now seventeen years later the very name of the reform is smothered up in an empty phrase about the need for a change that will insure the fair incidence of local taxation. A Liberal speaker at Mr. Lloyd George's meeting at Manchester, 28th April, declared that to-day there is no crusade, and because there is no crusade the Liberal Party is sick unto death. The speaker asked what hinders the crusade? He has an answer to his question in this Liberal housing betrayal.

The financial provisions of the Housing Bill now under consideration have been explained by the Ministry of Health. Approximately 200,000 working class houses have been built under subsidy these past four years at a cost to the taxpayer of some £10,000,000 a year, and if 120,000 extra houses are

built in the period provided in the Bill the charge to the taxpayer and the ratepayer will figure out at £2,000,000 per annum for 20 years, some £230,000 a year being earmarked for buying out the owners of slums.

It is in this way that the housing difficulty is to be overcome without touching a hair of the dog in the manger; and the Liberal attitude, by way of an after-thought, is to bring in a supplementary bill, introduced by the Independent Liberal, Captain Wedgwood Benn, to check the rapacity of "the rings round the house." The common has been stolen from the goose. It must be bought back as it is required at full market value; but the Liberals are determined that at least the bird shall not be fleeced of its feathers, or not too many of them. It sounds like the last word on Liberal housing, the "moderating influence of Liberalism."

It is the same with agriculture as with housing. The symptoms of the malady constitute the all-engrossing topic of discussion. As in the great debate on housing, the public is entertained to a fine wealth of detail that is quite sufficient to make the farmer wonder what it is he really does require to put him on his feet as a self-respecting member of the first of all industries.

The farmer has many complaints and there are cures for them all. He must wake up and be more industrious; he hunts with the hounds when he ought to be at book-keeping; he should learn the art of co-operation and so abolish the middleman; he must go to school and study up-to-date methods of getting to windward of a climate like ours; he should take a lesson from Denmark or Germany, and so on. There are others who regard the farmer as fighting a losing battle with economic forces, or what is termed the world market. How the farmers of Canada face up to it is never told. Here the thing has a place that is all its own at any agricultural meeting. It brooks no argument. The Government bill to better agriculture this time means a further direct contribution from the Exchequer of £2,750,000 a year in relief of rates. How the farmer is to retain this relief, in view of the dictum of some of his closest friends that the higher the cheque for rates the lower the cheque for rent, and *vice versa*, is a question that must not be raised.

What the farmer wants most is security of tenure, and until that is ceded him the agricultural industry, whatever else is done for it, must remain at the mercy of the dominant interest. In a criticism based on observation and experience, Sir A. D. Hall, in his book *AGRICULTURE AFTER THE WAR*, asserts "that in every district certain farms stand out, and if the neighbouring holdings, with the same class of land and the same opportunities, were only worked with equal intelligence and energy there would be no agriculture question to discuss." But so long as the farmer continues as a tenant at will, what is the good of lecturing him on his incapacity or indolence? Give him to understand that the results of his industry will not be taken from him in higher rent and taxation and then talk to him on the need for greater skill and organization! As Henry George says: "Give a man security that he may reap, and he will sow; assure him the possession of the house he wants to build, and he will build it. These are the natural rewards

of labour. It is for the sake of reaping that men sow; it is for the sake of possessing houses that men build." The ownership and control of land and the tax burdens that fall on the producer after he has met the demands of the non-producer are the chief barriers to progressive and up-to-date methods of cultivation. Do justice to the farmer, set him free of his legalized but unnatural bondage, and then say if he must have the support of the State to keep his industry a going concern.

But how is the farmer and his industry connected with land values taxation and how would the policy affect him? No question can be more readily answered. The farmer sends his produce to market direct, or it is taken there by some dealer who pays cash on the spot, or by credit. The price the farmer obtains for his produce is what the higgling of the market allows, and out of this he meets the obligations to landowner, banker, tax collector and worker, taking the balance for himself with more or less dissatisfaction. But after this transaction let us follow the produce to the markets. They are located in the towns and cities where the people are to be found by the million. The produce is widely distributed and on every stance where it is sold, in the warehouses, shops and open spaces, the value of land appears. Here in the centres of population the one side of a street provides as much economic rent as a whole countryside. This land value is not earned by the owners of these favoured sites. It represents the presence and industry of the people as a whole. It is a communal value, and when it is taken or taxed for public purposes the farmer, like other workers, will come by his own. At present with the rural districts it is a case of all exports and no imports. New roads and related improvements are in demand in every countryside, and millions are provided for the purpose, millions for the territorial landlords and for the others who own and control the approaches to the urban areas.

The farming community is not quite so dull as its spokesmen make it out to be. In the freer conditions Canada affords, the farmers can grasp the merits of Land Values Taxation and stand firmly enough for the reform. They can do so in Great Britain, or in any other country where they are free to speak for themselves.

Agriculture, we are warned by the landocracy and its well-equipped Press, is an industry that cannot very well be self-supporting; it is in the nature of the case that it must be dependent on the sympathy and charity of the public; in other words, it cannot survive without the help of the State. It is the same with the building trade, and the miners also call for a helping hand. In housing or coal it is not urged that foreign competition is an element in the distress. But any excuse will do when the public purse is placed at the disposal of the non-producer.

Discussing a rural policy for the Independent Labour Party, its organ, *THE NEW LEADER* (27th April), says: "The facts are obscure and in no new industry are the essential economic data so hard to come by." On the contrary, there is no industry which more openly lays bare the facts of its miserable existence. The economic data are in overflowing abundance. What is needed is the

recognition of a principle and a policy that will break through the fundamental monopoly that is at the root of the trouble.

What the farmer requires is the help that will enable him to help himself. It is what all other hard-pressed industries require, but it is just this line of action that the politicians, Labour or Liberal, will not take. They are out for control and not for freedom, and if they get much more of their own way, if their pro-landlord schemes are to advance without effective protest, peace in industry is far to seek. It is evident that the contest lies between those who stand for statistics, bureaucracy and the servile state, and those who are out for the economic freedom and justice that will bring industry and enterprise a measure of relief from the crushing burdens of monopoly, and from the misdirected zeal of our elected persons who pander to its all pervading and ever-consuming dominion.

J. P.

TOO LEARNED FOR US

A correspondent in Pittsburgh writes us:—"I take the following from a reviewer's quotation. It is from Mr. J. A. Hobson's book *THE ECONOMICS OF UNEMPLOYMENT*. If you can guess what it means, will you please explain it in some forthcoming issue of *LAND AND LIBERTY*."

"But if, as I am disposed to believe, no people is prepared to launch in any wholesale way on any of these revolutions, some mixed policy of national ownership of prime monopolies, control of profits, prices and conditions of employment in other industries where some measure and degree of direct and indirect competition survives, with a limited period of free profitable enterprise—the whole of this linked up by a tax system whereby society secures for beneficial public services the idle elements of income which do not nourish or evoke productive effort—this mixed policy adapted to the varying conditions in the world of industry will best achieve the better and more equal distribution and utilization of income that are required."

We give it up. Consult Job xxxviii., 2.

THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AT OXFORD

Our issue of last month contained an open and personal invitation to all readers of *LAND & LIBERTY* to join the International Conference on the Taxation of Land Values which will be held at Ruskin College, Oxford, England, from the 13th to the 20th August. In addition, letters have been sent to all Societies and Leagues existing in this country and abroad to promote the Taxation of Land Values, asking them to remind their members of our invitation.

The roll of membership is growing rapidly, and the number of those who will attend now exceeds 100. It may reach as many as 200. An announcement comes from Philadelphia giving 16 names, adding that this is only a partial list and saying that New York and New Jersey will probably send 100 persons to the Conference.

Thus far, the countries to be represented include Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Hungary, Germany, Spain, the United States and Australia. From this country we have enrolled members residing in London, Manchester, Birmingham, Carlisle, Annan, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Bristol, Norfolk, Keighley, Rotherham, Derby, Letchworth, Cambridge, Cardiff and various places in Yorkshire and Sussex.

Greetings to members from abroad will include a special reference to the initiative of the Spanish Single Tax League in convening the International Single Tax Conference held at Ronda, Spain, on 26th, 27th and 28th May, 1913. The resolutions passed on that occasion will be read, and the record of the proceedings will be entered in the minutes of the Oxford Conference.

The South American PARTIDO LIBERAL GEORGISTA (the Liberal Georgist Party) have sent a communication regretting that none of their members can be present, but enclose a memorandum with resolutions to be submitted for consideration. This is the first of the papers received from abroad stating what is being done or what is proposed, and we expect many more.

The programme of Addresses to be delivered is taking shape. One or two sessions have been definitely arranged on the growth of the Henry George idea in Denmark and the Land Value Tax legislation in that country; other sessions are arranged for Addresses on our legislative aims and next practical step in this country; on the movement in this country, its methods of propaganda and its organization;

on international co-operation and the services of an International Bureau of Information; on Enclaves of the Single Tax (Arden, Fairhope, etc.); on property and industry from the religious point of view. The programme is yet in the preliminary stages. There are so many questions and countries to be discussed that the time will be short enough, and it may be necessary to have more than two sessions a day.

In connection with the Conference, a Public Meeting will be held in Oxford on Friday evening, the 17th August, to be addressed by Members of Parliament; and the Assembly Room in the Municipal Buildings has been engaged for the purpose.

Inquiries from some of our correspondents suggest one or two matters by way of reply. The Conference is open to all who advocate the Taxation of Land Values. It is not a delegate Conference, requiring Leagues or Societies to appoint representatives. Each person comes as an individual to hear and discuss what is being done in the several countries to promote the Taxation of Land Values. The lecturers will give information about actual or proposed legislation, point to the lessons derived from practical experience, and contribute plans and suggestions for advancing our common cause.

The inclusive terms for board and lodging at Ruskin College and at the neighbouring Catholic Workers' College (which has also been engaged) will be £3 3s. per week. The bedroom accommodation at these Colleges is limited, but a number of members will yet be able to take meals at the common table at one or other of the Colleges and have a bedroom near by. For the latter, the meals will cost £2 2s., and a room outside can be had for £1 1s. or less for the week. For all the others we have full lists of suitable board and lodging in the neighbourhood at equally moderate terms. These lists (including also hotels) will be supplied to members if they wish to choose accommodation for themselves, or they may leave the arrangements in our hands.

The Conference Membership Fee is 10s. We would emphasize once again the importance of informing us AS SOON AS POSSIBLE of the intention to join the Conference. The success of the event is abundantly assured. No one concerned in promoting our movement should miss this exceptional opportunity to engage in these interesting discussions and meet friends from all parts. Let each and all try to fix holidays to fall in with our "Oxford Week."