

THE LABOUR LAND POLICY

Land Purchase and Bureaucracy

The Labour Party issued last month its Agricultural Policy to be considered at the Annual Conference at Leicester in October. It is based on land nationalization. A general enabling Act is to be passed, giving the State power to acquire land, rural or urban, on some suitable basis of compensation. Schedule A of the Income Tax is to be taken on the basis of compensation for purely agricultural land. This nationally owned land is to be placed in the hands of a Commission appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture on suitable grounds of ability together with farmers, farm-workers and consumers, and so forth, and so on, generally for planning the orderly development of agriculture.

National ownership and control of land, whether by land purchase or otherwise, in essence, means the ownership and control of the men who work on the land—that and nothing less. It is not the appropriation of the land that is urgent; it is the appropriation of the rent of land. In the stand they make for land purchase the Labour Party—the Party of the under-dog—are really proposing to make the worker buy his way to freedom. The Tory landlord diehards could not better the instruction.

The County Councils, farmers (farm-workers included), Urban Councils, Co-operative Guilds and such-like bodies, have their own ideas of town and country planning, and in freedom they are not likely to put themselves or their plans in the control of Whitehall bureaucrats, however appointed.

Labour leaders can on occasion tell how very much they are indebted to Henry George for his masterly analysis of the Land Question and related problems. The following passage from *Progress and Poverty* (Book VII, Chapter 3) is a part of the teaching that may not be ignored:—

“To buy up individual property rights would merely be to give the landholders in another form a claim of the same kind and amount that their possession of land now gives them; it would be to raise for them by taxation the same proportion of the earnings of labour and capital that they are now enabled to appropriate in rent. Their unjust advantage would be preserved and the unjust disadvantage of the non-landholders would be continued.”

It will be different under Socialism, we are told. No doubt, but Socialism before its own day, as some Socialists can affirm, means not Socialism but “State Capitalism.”

In a leading article on this Report the *Daily Herald* (the Labour daily) says:—

“The old system of private landlordism has broken down. The landlord has in the past been looked to for the supply of capital, and he has been assumed to promote and maintain a good standard of his husbandry. There is no longer any pretence of doing either, and the State has already in recent years had to take steps which would have been unnecessary had the landlord done his job.”

Outside, in the open field of labour endeavour and in the study classes, the teaching is and must be that the landlord does not supply capital and never did; that landlordism, as such, stands in the way of labour producing the capital it wants from the land.

All land purchase schemes make land dear and induce speculation in land values. This is not in dispute. The Roads and Bridges and Reconstruction Schemes of the past decade have provided an ample supply of illustrations which go to show that Labour has nothing to gain in these huge expenditures. On the contrary, Labour has everything to lose in the inevitable reaction against excessive tax burdens which can savagely express itself at the polling booth.

If the expenditure of public money could loosen the grip land monopoly has on the community, there might be something to say for it, but everywhere, in all lands and at all times, the result has been to stiffen the monopoly, create more unemployment and lower the standard of living.

The Municipalities strongly favour the Land Value Policy, and within their boundaries organized Labour has been foremost in the fight for it. We have heard representative Labour men on the platform explaining with approval why Land Value Taxation was needed and how

it would work for the public good. If this land purchase report is adopted, does it mean that henceforth Labour speakers will advocate land purchase as a means to better the condition of things?

In the matter of Free Trade the Report contends that there must be no Tariffs on food-stuffs, nor any quota schemes which discriminate against particular countries, whatever that may imply. An economic truth that seems hard to grasp is that in the final analysis a tariff on any industry is a tariff on food. The law that restricts output and raises the price of coal and cloth is a law that must inevitably reduce purchasing power all round. Quotas and subsidies whatever be their discriminating incidence at the council meeting merely take money from the public purse for private ends. Such tokens fill the eye but they cannot endure. Wages are not fixed by transfers of money from one class to another; they are fixed by the number of workers seeking employment in relation to the opportunities available. Where there are 95 men and 100 jobs, wages will be high, and where there are 95 jobs and 100 men wages will be low. No subsidy will ever get the better of that conclusion.

There is a decided reaction in the country against the tariff policy of the Government which has been clearly expressed at recent by-elections. The Labour Party are looking forward to forming the alternative Government, and the question now being put is: What about the alternative policy? Land nationalization is but the coping stone to Protection. It is not land nationalization that will liberate economic rent for the community. It is the nationalization of rent that will liberate the land from the fetters of monopoly.

Civilization has come to a critical stage in its development and surely it is along the lines of economic freedom that the Labour Party must travel if it would have free men and not slaves in the service. J. P.

THE SINGLE TAX AND COMPENSATION

“The thing which is unjust, which is not according to God's law, will you, in a God's universe, try to conserve that? It is so old, say you? Yes, and the hotter haste ought you, of all others, to be in to let it grow no older.”—CARLYLE.

The Single Tax proposes to absorb the rental value of land. Not without compensation. But without special compensation. There will be a general and immense compensation in the abolition of all the levies that are now made—licences, stamp duties, excises, customs tariffs on imported goods, taxes on dwellings and buildings for every purpose, merchandise, machinery—capital generally—“wealth” in all forms—taxes that now press with terrible force upon industry. Besides, land will cease to be held unused or imperfectly used simply in order that landlords may profit by rise in rental value. For “rent,” present and prospective, becomes the common property of all, and the “poor widow,” so often cited, will, merely as one of the people, possess an equal right of use in all the land of the State, and become one of the owners in common of its rent, with a full, natural and equal opportunity to obtain the comforts of life that is now denied her.

“The institution of the Single Tax does not mean the destruction of any right but the cessation of a wrong.” And who that reflects upon the meaning of “land,” and discovers that it includes not only agricultural, but city lands, railway land, mines, oil lands, water-power, harbour fronts—all; and that not only will he have a full and just share, but his children and his children's children to the end of time, shall demand “compensation”? Could anyone, no matter how rich, by abandoning not only his “rent,” but his houses and other “wealth,” bring about the Single Tax, would he not be immensely the gainer? For the richest now are never free from anxiety, and in the ordinary course some of their descendants will be landless and poor. While with the great masses life is nothing but a struggle, and often a bitter one. Great inequality “poisoning, so to speak, the very air that rich and poor alike must breathe.” Compensation! It is all compensation.—JAMES LOVE in *Japanese Notions of European Political Economy*.