

## LAND & LIBERTY

Published by THE UNITED COMMITTEE FOR THE  
TAXATION OF LAND VALUES.

Thirty-first Year. Established June, 1894.

3d. Monthly. By Post 4s. per annum.

United States and Canada, 1 Dollar

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The Postage on this issue is One Half-penny.

## LIBERAL LAND POLICY

At the National Liberal Convention held in London last January, convened to frame a programme in harmony with the new times, the Taxation of Land Values was placed in the forefront of the Land Section of urgent reforms, being lifted almost unanimously from the fifth to the first place in the programme.

But the scene changes and within the short space of nine months we have the new Liberal land policy as adumbrated by Mr. Lloyd George in his speech at Killerton, near Exeter, on 17th September. The full report of his Land Inquiry Committee is to be published in a week's time. Meanwhile we regard the Killerton speech as a complete recantation of the famous Limehouse pronouncement of 1909. Limehouse declared that the land belonged to the people and that the value of land was public revenue but was being wrongfully appropriated by private individuals. The Killerton confession is to the effect that if the land belongs to the people, its rent or value belongs to the landlords. In other words, it gives "the law to the north and the nigger to the south." In the name of Liberal land policy the landlords are to be relieved of the care and worry of collecting rents to say nothing of the worry they have over the inefficient farmer. The State is to take over this responsibility and compensate the landlords with fixed annuities, paid regularly we assume, whatever may happen to the rent that the State can get from the farmer.

The land once secured in this Alice-in-Wonderland fashion the farmers will be given security of tenure on the condition that they show capacity and industry. In cases where inefficiency is apparent such farmers will be expelled as a disgrace to the industry and as a warning to all others who may be tempted to leave the plough for the hunt. And then there is the usual "ladder" for the agricultural labourer to climb, or for those who can guarantee the strength and endurance equal to the standard of efficiency laid down by the committees of control.

Such in brief outline is the new Liberal land policy. The poacher and hen-rooster of 1909 has turned gamekeeper and essays to come down on the comfortable side of the land question. It is a marvellous performance. In 1909 the land monopoly was to be "burst." Land Valuation and Taxation of Land Values were the instruments. The local rating of land values and the unrating of houses and improvements were promised. "The Government," said Mr. Lloyd George at Glasgow in 1914, "are pledged to this policy and I am no shirker." He now comes forward with an opposing

policy, and asserts that, "If the nation had long ago annexed the land values it has created for private owners by the enterprise of all, our taxation, local and Imperial, would be much lighter than it is to-day, and we should have something to spare for further development without imposing any fresh taxes." Why not let the "long ago" stay where it is in history, and begin now with the reform? The leader of the Liberal Party, Lord Oxford and Asquith, has but yesterday affirmed that the Taxation of Land Values did not involve a new or additional burden of taxation, that it would benefit enterprise and industry, and further, that the land would come more readily into the best use for which it was fitted. If that is not in dispute it surely implies that one touch of Land Values Taxation is first and fundamental.

The Taxation of Land Values means the appropriation of the communal value of land, and in economic incidence the promotion of industry and progress. There is no such thing as "past land value" to exempt—because it was created in the middle of last century or earlier. All land value is created by the community day by day and year by year. It is admitted that the case for Land Value Taxation holds good in the cities and towns, but there are some who allege it is not for agricultural land. The answer is that land monopoly exists in the rural districts as the promoters of building schemes can tell. Denmark is *par excellence* an agricultural country. It has a national land value tax in operation and the Danish Parliament has before it a measure for the local rating of land values with a corresponding relief of improvements. If land valuation and Taxation of Land Values can be applied in Denmark, the land of small holders and co-operative marketing, why cannot it be applied in Great Britain?

Campbell-Bannerman wanted to make the land less a pleasure ground for the rich and more a treasure house for the nation. The Lloyd George slogan of 1909 was to "burst" the land monopoly so that "the children of the people might enter into their inheritance from on high." As Prime Minister seven years ago, before the glowing post-war days of promised reconstruction, Mr. Lloyd George scrapped the valuation, the one thing needful for Land Values Taxation and the one thing that was of any value in the "People's Budget." And he executed the deed at the bidding of the landlord agencies behind his Coalition Government, and in spite of the protests of the Liberal leaders and the whole rank and file of the Party. He conveniently ignores this past record and seeks now on an appointed day to make the tenant farmers the landlords of the country under the supervision of a junta of bureaucrats and with the agricultural labourer still at the beck and call of a master.

Mr. Lloyd George's Liberal or national Land Inquiry Committee, whoever they may be, have been working overtime for the last two years on the problem of how to dispose of the prey they have still to capture. The agencies of the tried and condemned landlords are already out and about, and on the balance we incline to the belief that they are equipped at all corners of the National Estate to give this Inquiry Committee a good run for their money. These land agencies are more powerful and more firmly entrenched in the soil than the

landlords themselves. They are about as numerous and just as well favoured as the "widows and orphans" who were put in front of the 1909 agitation. Generally speaking they manage the landlords as well as the land, collect the rents, carry out the repairs, keep an eye on the inefficient farmer, fix the terms for the labourer who has the ambition to climb into a small holding and all the rest. They are in command of the situation and it is the height of folly to suggest that anything can be achieved through an effort to hand over their functions to committees appointed by State or County.

The new policy will do nothing whatever to open up land for use that is not cultivated or developed. For example, it leaves absolutely in the hands of the owner all that land that is held for pleasure or sport or "amenity." It does not propose to interfere with the occupation of land that is not at present tenanted or that has not been bought by occupying tenants at exorbitant prices during and after the war. As to the rest of the land covering a vast territory and much of it lying idle, what will or can the policy do to cheapen it and subdivide it for farms or small holdings or market gardens or allotments? Apparently nothing. Moreover, as everyone knows, there is a great extent of land used for agriculture, and occupied by tenants, that is near or even within urban boundaries. It has a so-called building value, and if compensation to landowners is to be the rule before the State can take over the management, monstrous indeed will be the tribute exacted from the taxpayer. In that regard, there is something sinister, and subversive of all Liberal professions, in Mr. Lloyd George's view that only building values "*created for the future*" are to go to the community.

Nor is there any suggestion that it is necessary to amend or reform the existing system of taxation. If land is idle it escapes taxation. If it is improved, the burden of taxation is thrown upon it. The evils that flow from that anomaly are as apparent in rural as in urban districts. The effects are universally recognised in higher cost of buildings and housing shortage. Yet it is proposed "to settle men on the land" under such a handicap and obstacle to all enterprise. What is, after all, the first requisite for progressive agriculture? Are not houses required for the people to live in? Must there not be steadings and barns for sheltering the beasts and storing the produce? And can agriculture flourish unless all sorts of dependent services are performed by buyer and seller who must also live in houses and who also require buildings for their industries?

In a very real sense the problem of agriculture is a housing question and all that public policy has done so far is to pile the taxes on houses and buildings. The policy of the Agricultural Rates Acts, by reducing the rates on uncovered lands, has only made matters worse. It has shifted taxation from the shoulders of the owner to the shoulders of the occupier of houses and other farm buildings. And the farmer, relieved from rates on the land, has to pay just so much more rent to the owner—and for the latter there will be just so much more compensation payable under this preposterous scheme.

Mr. Lloyd George says: "If we can settle more people on the land and produce more food from the land, we can confidently hope to solve some of our more pressing problems." As an eminent writer once put it, "if is a great peacemaker." Of course, it is true that *if* we could settle more men on the land, we could solve other problems. But how to settle the men on the land, with a chance to make a good living and assured of a full reward for their labour, is itself the problem, and Mr. Lloyd George's policy provides no solution. The scheme is one purely for the tenant-farmer who is to get security under the State, and to whom much of the dominion now in the hands of landowners will be transferred. All farmers who are tenants at present are to have undisputed possession until they or their sons die or until some committee of experts declares that the farmer is "inefficient." What does the agricultural labourer get out of it all, and what chance is there for the man who is willing and able to cultivate the land if he could but get a foothold? Apparently he has to wait for dead men's shoes or learn gladly that incompetence has been proved against someone else, before there is really any land available to him for a farm or small holding.

This new Liberal Land Policy has, we are assured, yet to be considered and dealt with by the National Liberal Federation. What are they going to do about it? A representative Liberal who stands high in the counsels of the Party writes:—

"I don't like the way the leaders of the Liberal Party are 'toying' with nationalization. It appears to me that they are simply playing into the hands of those who say that there is no need for the Liberal Party nowadays, because I can fancy the ordinary voter saying, 'Well, there seems to be very little to choose between Liberal and Labour, so I may as well vote for the one who promises most.' I have always understood Liberalism to mean liberty to the individual to make the most of his opportunities, and as far as I can see the Taxation of Land Values is much more likely to help in that direction than any tinkering such as appears to be attempted in COAL AND POWER and Lloyd George's latest speech as reported in the Press."

Our correspondent is not identified with the organized movement for the Taxation of Land Values. He has held high office in the service of his country under Liberal administration, and now holds an influential position in the Liberal Party. He speaks for very many who have always been steadfast and true to the land value policy. It will not help the prospects of the Liberal Party if the Federation turns them down in favour of the so-called Liberal Land Inquiry Committee. But that is more the concern of the Liberals themselves.

We have been asked for a word of guidance, and we have been urged to speak out by many of our own subscribers. It is the practice of LAND & LIBERTY to speak out. And the word this time is as always: Let us maintain the principle and policy of Land Values Taxation. Rightly and simply explained, it can carry conviction after as before the war.

Mr. Lloyd George speaks at times as if the great war had brought us into a new world with special

post-war problems and an altogether different outlook on life. It certainly has brought us the prevailing volume of mass unemployment and industrial depression, a war debt interest of a million a day, with another million or two a week to provide food and shelter for the afflicted workers and their dependents, apart from ordinary taxation and rating levies to keep the ship of State afloat. As industry staggers under the load, the belief that we are on the road to ruin is fast becoming more than a passing remark, and we witness on every hand the growing impatience and despair of all classes in the community.

The war and its devastation count for much, but there are some things that still persist or have only changed in the sense that the evils have become more aggravated. Chief of these is the land monopoly in town and country alike, and until it is approached and handled as the outstanding obstruction to all improvement there is little hope of any real progress. The war did not cancel the law of rent and its corollary the law of wages. The private rent collector encroaches on all efficiency and land speculation still throttles industry. It is a curse that remains, a standing menace to all industrial development. Housing schemes, new roads, railway expansion enrich the land speculator and point to the land monopoly as the root cause of the trouble.

There are signs that we are approaching some kind of crisis and Mr. Lloyd George has at least done some service in pointing to the urgency of a change in our land system. Although his remedy is futile and worse, and has already been put to searching and damaging criticism, he has provoked discussion.

The fiasco of the 1909 Budget lies in broken fragments across the path of radical land reform. The new departure unfolded by its author at Killer-ton, together with his recent COAL AND POWER manifesto, advocating purchase of mining royalties, appears to be a deliberate attempt to jettison the Taxation of Land Values and its implications from the Liberal platform. We must face this reactionary land propaganda and counter it for all we are worth. LAND & LIBERTY is not without influence for any such engagement, and the call is to every subscriber the world over to strengthen the paper and its related services for this new land campaign. We have the agency, and the sentiment for the Land Value policy exists in every quarter. We are moving fast and far from the apathy and despondency cast over our politics by the last general election. It is our opportunity and we earnestly ask all concerned to give us of their best at this testing time.

J. P.

PROGRESS AND POVERTY. Abridged by Anna George de Mille, published by Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York. Cloth, 4s. 6d.

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From our Offices.

## "LAND & LIBERTY" SUSTENTION FUND, 1925—1928

We are once more asking a renewal of the Sustention Fund in support of "Land & Liberty."

A subscriber in the North of England says he has been told by a new reader that "Land & Liberty," compared with other journals published to promote movements and causes, was of such high standard in matter and manner, and was so well equipped with information, that there must be money behind it. As it happens, that is also the declared and recorded opinion of hosts of readers and it is an eloquent tribute to the service the journal seeks to render.

Be that as it may, the plain truth is that there is no money behind "Land & Liberty," apart from the contingent revenue it receives from its own circle of friends, who realize that the price at which the journal is sold is not nearly sufficient to meet the costs of publication. The value of the journal, to all who are attached to it, is to be measured by its character and influence. And by that criterion the journal is entitled to a much better financial standing than it enjoys. It is this much-needed improvement that we are this month seeking through contributions to the Sustention Fund, which has helped so materially in the past six years.

Those who read "Land & Liberty" will know that it is not a money-making journal; it exists to make opinion for Land Value Taxation as a means to economic freedom and independence; and further, its function is to bind together the men and women of the movement and to help them in their various spheres of enterprise.

"Land & Liberty" commands the attention and even the respect of our well-placed opponents; but what is more to the purpose it is universally accepted by our people at home and abroad as the most important and persuasive feature of our propaganda. To speakers and writers it is an acknowledged source of strength which can be weighed and measured by the day-to-day growth of the sentiment for the social justice it advocates.

The news and arguments the journal supplies each month on land and labour problems are taken into the daily and weekly papers and magazines by our gifted and tireless press correspondents; and the service extends to parliamentarians and journalists free to make use of such material. In these ways the journal each month reaches out to a public far beyond the confines of its own mailing list.

We could fill pages of the paper at intervals with glowing appreciations of the high esteem in which it is held by representative readers. Here are just a few that will suffice for all:—

W. B. D. (England): "May I add a word of appreciation to the paper of the movement. I have taken it for eighteen years and I value it as much if not more than ever. I look forward eagerly to its appearance, read its pages with interest, and admire the editorial staff almost to envy. I offer you on behalf of my friend and myself our whole-hearted and honest congratulation."