

LAND & LIBERTY

(Incorporating "LAND VALUES.")

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

Twenty-ninth Year. Established June, 1894.

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

United States and Canada, 1 Dollar.

Editorial Offices:

11, TOTHILL STREET, LONDON, S.W.1.

All communications to be addressed to the Editor.

Telegrams: "Eulav, Vic, London."

Telephone: Victoria 7525.

"NO REMEDY FOR UNEMPLOYMENT"

The vote given at the General Election last month is a positive, and in some quarters is held to be, an alarming rebound from the verdict at the polls of four years ago. The Prime Minister claims the result as a vote of confidence in him and his Government. Mr. Bonar Law may talk to himself in this tranquil manner, but the facts are that out of fourteen and a half million votes registered, the Tory Party, whom he represents, polled but five million and a half. Even the Prime Minister himself, represents a minority of the electors of Central Glasgow. Mr. Bonar Law and his party are in office, but they have no moral sanction to act for the electorate. They can only occupy their seats and draw their salaries because of our out-of-date system of voting. These are the bald facts of the case.

The main issues at the election were on the part of the Labour Party, the capital levy, or some sort of cut into the swollen fortunes of the wealthy classes; and on the part of the Tory Party "enforced economy, reduced taxation, and the restoration of our home and overseas trade." If a capital levy means the taxation of capital we reject it as a policy that would injure and not help the worker; as for "economy," how can that be a remedy, when the occasion calls for an increase in the production of wealth and a more equitable distribution?

The leader of the Liberal Party, Mr. Asquith, threatened to expose the capital levy proposal, but failed to do anything of the kind. He roundly abused the thing, as he understood it, as likely to bring disaster to the country and all concerned, and put forward Mr. Bonar Law's policy as the Liberal alternative. Speaking at Paisley, 13th November, he declared:—

"The Liberal alternative was to make industry more productive, first by rigid ruthless economy in public expenditure, and next by preserving the inestimable boon of the open market. The markets of the world were all one and it was nothing but the folly and shortsightedness of man which placed barriers between. In that way they would reduce debt and the burden of interest on it year by year and get largely rid of unemployment."

Not one word during the whole contest fell from his lips as to the urgency of thorough-going radical land reform. The Liberal candidates here and there may have raised that issue, but the candidate for Paisley was having none of it. The question served his purpose well at the Paisley by-election two years ago, but this time it had to be content with a place as the eighth item in his election address, there to be seen and not talked about.

As for Mr. Lloyd George, the leader of the despised half of the Liberal Tabernacle, he slashed all round with his wooden sword, entertaining his mob on the vacant spaces wherever the show halted on its way to perdition. Sir George Younger, who brought the ex-Premier to earth at the Carlton Club, must have enjoyed reading the newspaper accounts of the various performances.

Such were the issues of the 1922 election as set forth and directed by the various leaders on scores of platforms. Each and all had a good enough Press and the emptiness of their speeches was fully revealed. The candidates hammered away on their own, the Tories and Coalition Liberals on the defence and the others attacking their past reckless conduct of affairs. It was a great exposure, but what the taxpayer, the business community, and the idle workers are to get out of it is hard to say. In passing, we wonder if at the close of the election Mr. Lloyd George cast his mind back twelve years ago when he won the 1910 elections on the issue of the Land for the People.

Mr. Bonar Law's desire for a peaceful time to pull things together again after the insane extravagance and mis-management by the late Government, of which he was a prominent member in its most prodigal days, is countered at once by the cry of the hunger marchers, and his dream of tranquillity comes to pieces as the realities of the unemployed problem appear at Westminster. The late Government's schemes of relief were at once taken out of the pigeon-holes. The railway companies were urged to go forward with undertakings that will lead to employment and better trade. The unhappy state of Europe it has been at last discovered, need not stand in the way of some land being put to purposes of higher utility. But why stop at railway extension and improvement? Why not open up all desired land held at ransom prices against industrial expansion?

The Liberal Party is paying dearly enough these times for its callous neglect of the people, the party's former supporters and the abiding source of its past great strength, who by unjust laws are condemned to an existence in the squalid slum areas of our towns and cities. For eight long years, 1906 to 1914, the Liberals were in power. They would not or could not redeem their pledges to the people on land reform and better housing conditions. They promised much to the suffering millions and accomplished nothing. It is on record that when the Liberals were put out of commission there were worse housing conditions and more land hunger than before they came to govern. The chief Liberal organizations have turned again to the tax on land values, but their accepted leaders, those who would be included in any Liberal Government, or act as front bench men in Opposition will not have it. Campbell Bannerman's emancipating land policy is not for them; content to remain

in the rut of free imports they stubbornly refuse to say one word on the need for freedom to produce wealth at home. They stress the markets of the world as a means to employment and keep silent about the economic injustice of our antiquated land system which bars the way to so much production and prosperity at home.

The MANCHESTER GUARDIAN ever on the track of any proposed remedy for unemployment, remarked in its issue of 23rd November :—

Of all the problems before the new Government that of unemployment is probably the most nearly insoluble. About all others most people would if asked be ready enough with their opinion. They will not agree, but each individual may think he knows what policy the Government ought to follow over, let us say, the Near East, Reparations, Russia, the National Debt, or the housing shortage. But who is rash enough to claim that he knows the remedy for unemployment?

That can be taken as a fair statement of the case as presented by all conventional authority, including the Press. We should like to ask the leader writer of the MANCHESTER GUARDIAN a question, namely: If employment means the expansion of industrial enterprise, is land monopoly not a barrier in between? To urge that this is the cause, or a cause, of involuntary idleness, may appear to be a rash claim, and it is, if there be no case against monopoly in the raw material of all industry. How can any beginning be made with schemes of employment except as land is put to use? It may look like a magician's wand to say that in the liberation of the land is to be found the cure for unemployment; nevertheless it is true that land must be at the disposal of any scheme designed to give men a livelihood and increase the production of wealth.

Without access to land, no amount of capital, efficiency or even rigid economy will suffice. And that being so it is not clear that the land question is the crux of the unemployed problem? It may be the opinion of the MANCHESTER GUARDIAN that land monopoly, generally expressed in high-priced land, is not the chief cause of the trouble. But is it "rash enough" to maintain that the provision of land for any scheme of improvement is not a governing factor in the case?

Take the Government schemes of relief now being considered. Road-making, work in agricultural areas, post office extensions, even the £50,000,000 for trade facilities, what are they but Alice-in-Wonderland notions if unrelated to the use of land? In the course of the Commons debate on Unemployment, 30th November, Mr. Clynes declared that "Among the suggested schemes on which men might be employed were open air swimming baths, playing fields, light railways for the agricultural districts, slum clearances, the building of institutes in rural areas, and, greatest of all opportunities, housing." What are any or all of these schemes for providing employment, but a demand for land? Can the MANCHESTER GUARDIAN or Mr. Clynes say anything to the contrary? And do either of them expect us to believe at this time of day that the monopoly of the land has not stood in the way, and does not now stand in the way of such development? To

argue the case as if the necessary land were at the service of improvement and enterprise is to ignore the facts of everyday experience.

Commenting on the debate a Liberal journalist said: "The Labour weakness was that, although they diagnosed the disease, they could offer no remedy except great hopes from a new social millennium." This is a view of the matter that is generally held to be correct. But it will not stand serious examination. To get at the root of the trouble is to discover the remedy, and if the Labour Party has no remedy to offer but the millennium, then what better are they than the Liberals and Tories they are out to supplant?

The universal admission was that, short of the millennium, there was no panacea for unemployment. Of course there is none, while natural opportunities are held idle. Land monopoly is the eternal lock-out of labour and until it is overthrown nothing worth having can be achieved. The Taxation of Land Values is not offered as a panacea, that is rather the description of the schemes now being put through the legislative machine; the reform is advocated so that all other proposed schemes of improvement may work out to the advantage of the community and not to any privileged class, and because it can be put into operation without delay.

In the debate, the land question in relation to housing and rating was raised by several Labour members. Land monopoly was misnamed private enterprise by one speaker, who when asked what he was going to do about it replied: "If we had to deal with the land, the first thing we should do would be to hand it back to the British people." No doubt when the millennium arrives we shall all know about it. This may be good enough talk at the street corner, but in the House of Commons it is worthless. "As to housing," the speaker continued, "we would grant the local authorities power to take over for the purpose of building sites any suitable land in their area at the price at which it stood in the valuation roll"—a discriminating proposal difficult to defend even if it had any purpose. The owner of the land affected can very well complain that he is not responsible for a rating system that encourages him, according to the speaker, one of the best specimens of landlordism, "to demand £714 an acre for land that had no value and paid nothing to the rates for 40 years." Why not alter the rating system by taking taxes off houses and rate all land on its market value? The Labour Party declare they are out against the system and not to condemn individuals. Let them put this principle into practice and they will take the first sound step to the solution of the housing problem.

The "housing shortage" is a land question, a wages question, and a rating question. The Taxation of Land Values would cheapen land and the unrating of houses would bring capital into the building trade and labour into the field of employment at one bound. The Near East, Reparations, Russia and the National Debt each and all of these vexations have nothing to do with the kind of employment that is ours for the asking if the new Parliament had the courage and the will to attack the enemy within the gates.

J. P.