

## LAND & LIBERTY

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### THE OXFORD CONFERENCE

Let us have faith that right is might, and in that faith let us dare to do our duty as we understand it.—  
*Abraham Lincoln.*

What have we to say about the Oxford Conference? That is a question. It was an epoch-making event, a magnificent tribute to the strength of the movement for the Taxation of Land Values. That is the opinion of all who were in attendance, except a few wreckers and malcontents who came deliberately bent on mischief. But the Conference quickly enough put them in their place and kept them there throughout the week's proceedings. In the light of what was accomplished, we can now afford to ignore their noise and shouting. They had nothing to contribute to the object of the Conference, and this they made plain and clear, even to the strangers who came to listen and to learn. One touch of our policy, one penny in the £ on the market value of land would bury them and their lugubrious pretensions for ever out of sight.

What about Mr. Asquith's action in cancelling his engagement? It is for the man himself to explain. He declares that he and his party stand for the Taxation of Land Values. He was offered a platform such as he could not command elsewhere to state his case for the reform. A crowded meeting was eager to hear him speak on the subject, but at the instance of an insignificant minority of five, he refused to keep his engagement. It is difficult to believe that the bad manners of five obstreperous opponents kept Mr. Asquith from the meeting. The incident has since been canvassed up and down the country, in the press and in the clubs, and everywhere there is an overwhelming majority in favour of the view that it was something else, or somebody else, who influenced his decision. Be that as it may, Mr. Asquith lightly cast aside an unique opportunity of speaking on the subject to the country and to the world beyond its shores. The Taxation of Land Values has been put into practice in many countries, and there are other places now considering the matter as an urgent and necessary step to sound finance and municipal expansion. A word from Mr. Asquith in support of the policy at an International Conference with representatives from fourteen different countries present would have

cheered them on and done no end of good to promote the movement. Many of these representatives, holding positions of trust, and working out their plans in the teeth of bitter opposition, had hailed the promised speech as a great triumph and encouragement to them. It is difficult to find words adequate to express their disappointment when the chairman announced that the speaker was adamant and would not reconsider his decision.

Mr. Asquith can say what he likes about his adhesion to the reform, but the reply is that at a moment when he could have helped forward its advance all along the line of high endeavour, and when he had pledged his word to speak he declined to do so, and in the most cavalier manner. But such is the leadership that has brought the Liberal Party to its present low position. The Liberal Party is in the wilderness to-day, but the Taxation of Land Values, which the Liberal Cabinet did so much to injure in its 1909 fiasco, has survived. The defined justice has taken root in the community outside political organization. The sentiment behind the land value policy is not, and never has been, confined to party politics. If that were so, the movement would have gone under in the 1909 disaster. That was what the Oxford Conference revealed.

Mr. Asquith was not invited to speak at the Conference as leader of the Liberal Party. That was a mere circumstance which had to be accepted for good or evil. He was asked to take part in the proceedings because he had in a recent speech declared that the Taxation of Land Values did not involve a new or additional tax burden; and that in the untaxing of successful enterprise and industry, in bringing land more readily and cheaply into the best use for which it is fitted, we had two potent promoters of industry and progress. If any other man of Mr. Asquith's standing in our public life in any circle had spoken these words, he would have been asked to speak on the subject at Oxford. We have neither time nor inclination to contest this position with anyone holding the contrary opinion.

Mr. Arthur Henderson's letter to the Conference vividly illustrates the changing mood of the Labour Party towards Land Values Taxation. It is not an overstatement of the case to say that ten years ago, or less, Mr. Henderson, as General Secretary of the Party, could not have issued such a pronouncement. But the yeast has been working in the Labour ranks, and Labour M.P.'s and candidates are getting to know that their past neglect of the land question has not been to their advantage. Mr. Henderson's contribution to the discussion at Oxford was well received, and our people from abroad return with the conviction that the Labour Party in Great Britain are with them in the determination to make good and that their Secretary was courageous enough to make this clear at our epoch-making International.

So much for the politicians. The week's meetings indicated a strength and a purpose not born of party politics, but from a deep conviction that the Taxation of Land Values is a just and expedient reform. That without it there can be no settlement of the housing question or of unemployment; that the rights of the people to the land are linked up with these reforms, and that it will yet prevail. Free trade, so called, ends in monopolies, trusts and combines as we have them to-day. Real

free trade means freedom to produce wealth as well as to exchange it after it is produced; and this new freedom is to be found in the Taxation of Land Values. International free trade as at present advocated is but a dream, so long as the natural sources of wealth remain in the grip of land monopoly.

That was the teaching of the Oxford Conference. It was not put forward as a panacea for all the economic wrongs in society, but it was affirmed that without the Taxation of Land Values all other measures designed to better the condition of the people are worse than useless.

The addresses named on the programme and the speeches they evoked, with the exception of the handful who came clothed in arrogance and hostility, were on a high level from beginning to end. It was an audience tuned to the music of Henry George's great message; ready to listen and eager to learn. At other conferences conflicting opinion is as a rule difficult to follow. Not so at Oxford. The audience knew instinctively what the criticism was about and how to sort it out. There was a sense of proportion and understanding at every session that indicated an informed conference. "What gifted speakers you have," a visitor said, "I have never been at such an inspiring meeting. I could listen to it all over again." Another was asked to step outside for some purpose: "Not much!" was the reply; "I can meet you when the speaking here is over."

The conveners were warmly congratulated on bringing together so many Single Taxers to take part in one of the most inspiring weeks in the history of the movement. The brethren from across the seas were impressed by the case put forward for future developments. They recognized and admitted that the Taxation of Land Values was regarded in our politics as a question of immediate importance. Our friends return home with that impression. They have seen and heard for themselves. They will pass along the good news to their colleagues, and in their press, and in that knowledge we stand to gain. It is no small matter we have in hand in making opinion and giving direction to our advancing public, and in the fight it is something to have the support and goodwill of our friends abroad.

The course we steer was acclaimed with emphasis and with an enthusiasm at Oxford that knew no bounds. Let this be maintained. It is not difficult to carry on at Tothill Street, except in one respect, and that is the need for additional financial strength.

The Oxford Conference will stand out as a landmark in the history and progress of our movement. Its high purpose was fully and successfully achieved. The spirit of good fellowship was over it all. There were old friendships to renew and new friends to meet, friends and co-workers well worth knowing for their own sakes, no less than for the good deeds and faithful service that stand to their credit in the book of life that is ours. We met to reaffirm our belief in the justice of our cause, to learn what had been accomplished in legislation in many lands, and to take counsel together with a view to our future plan of campaign. In all the stimulating conversations and findings we had a reward that more than justified our coming together. J.P.

## A WORD FROM HENRY GEORGE

### *Not Charity, but Justice*

#### *What can the Rich Man do?*

As faith without works is dead, as men cannot give to God His due while denying to their fellows the rights He gave them, so charity unsupported by justice can do nothing to solve the problem of the existing condition of labour. Though the rich were to "bestow all their goods to feed the poor and give their bodies to be burned," poverty would continue while property in land continues.

Take the case of the rich man to-day who is honestly desirous of devoting his wealth to the improvement of the condition of labour. What can he do? Bestow his wealth on those who need it? He may help some who deserve it, but will not improve general conditions. And against the good he may do will be the danger of doing harm.

Build churches? Under the shadow of churches poverty festers and the vice that is born of it breeds.

Build schools and colleges? Save as it may lead men to see the iniquity of private property in land, increased education can effect nothing for mere labourers, for as education is diffused the wages of education sink.

Establish hospitals? Why, already it seems to labourers that there are too many seeking work, and to save and prolong life is to add to the pressure.

Build model tenements? Unless he cheapens house accommodation he but drives further the class he would benefit, and as he cheapens house accommodation he brings more to seek employment and cheapen wages.

Institute laboratories, scientific schools, workshops for physical experiments? He but stimulates invention and discovery, the very forces that, acting on a society based on private property in land, are crushing labour as between the upper and the nether millstone.

Promote emigration from places where wages are low to places where they are somewhat higher? If he does, even those whom he at first helps to emigrate will soon turn on him to demand that such emigration shall be stopped as reducing their wages.

Give away what land he may have, or refuse to take rent for it, or let it at lower rents than the market price? He will simply make new landowners or partial landowners; he may make some individuals the richer, but he will do nothing to improve the general condition of labour.

Or, bethinking himself of those public-spirited citizens of classic times who spent great sums in improving their native cities, shall he try to beautify the city of his birth or adoption? Let him widen and straighten narrow and crooked streets, let him build parks and erect fountains, let him open tramways and bring in railways, or in any way make beautiful and attractive his chosen city, and what will be the result? Must it not be that those who appropriate God's bounty will take his also? Will it not be that the value of land will go up, and that the net result of his benefactions will be an increase of rents and a bounty to landowners? Why, even the mere announcement that he is going to do such things will start speculation and send up the value of land by leaps and bounds.

What, then, can the rich man do to improve the condition of labour?

He can do nothing at all except to use his strength for the abolition of the great primary wrong that robs men of their birthright. The justice of God laughs at the attempts of men to substitute anything else for it.—From "*The Condition of Labour*."