

LAND & LIBERTY

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Here are two simple principles, both of which are self-evident :

I.—That all men have equal rights to the use and enjoyment of the elements provided by Nature.

II.—That each man has an exclusive right to the use and enjoyment of what is produced by his own labour.

There is no conflict between these principles. On the contrary, they are correlative. To secure fully the individual right of property in the produce of labour, we must treat the elements of Nature as common property.—*Henry George*: "Protection or Free Trade," chapter 26.

THE PAISLEY POLICY

The Paisley Policy consisting of Mr. Asquith's speeches at the recent bye-election has been issued in book form and is accepted by Liberals as a new and up-to-date interpretation of the Liberal creed. In a foreword the Member for Paisley says the election contest "provided me with the opportunity of surveying domestic and international problems in their various aspects, and of stating what I conceive to be the Liberal attitude towards them."

The Liberal attitude to international problems can be readily enough summarized even though the Liberal Party and the Liberal leaders fall short of its fulfilment. It means a policy and a temper that will make for mutual respect and understanding, with a view to international peace. It means a policy of getting on well with our neighbours, and to this end recognizing their right to make the most of their lives without let or hindrance from us. It means minding our own business and allowing other people to mind theirs. In the sphere of economic intercourse the Liberal doctrine can give no countenance to the false belief that the prosperity of one nation is at the expense of another; on the contrary, our best security and our own industrial success depend upon the abundance of other nations; their prosperity enriches us just as their poverty reacts through the channels of trade and commerce to our undoing. Nor is this sound doctrine particular to Liberalism, but is common to all advanced thought. In publicly acclaiming Free Trade the organized Labour Party has earned the right to a place with those who stand for international freedom.

The solution of international problems depends upon the solution of domestic problems. Given the solution of social and industrial problems at home, internationalism will become a living reality, instead of the political make-belief it is to-day. Let us, on

the other hand, continue to be harassed with unsettled home questions, let us be faced with industrial unrest and the growing threats of direct action, and what hope is there in reaching out to any measure of understanding in the wider realm of human affairs? In a very real sense there is no international problem of a serious kind facing us that has not its roots firmly embedded in the social injustice that holds in check the higher ambitions of the people of every land.

The battle of civil and political liberty is practically an accomplished fact. The question is entirely one of economic and industrial freedom. The day has arrived for our forward-looking politicians to state definitely and explicitly what measures they are prepared to take to begin the advance into the new territory. It is evident that the workers are determined to have possession of the means of life. They are out for deeds not words, and if they are bent on wrong methods it is for those who know better, and those who profess to know better, to give right direction to this movement.

Free Trade, or what Mr. Asquith would call the Liberal attitude to Free Trade, has served its day. "Free Trade," we are admonished with so much gravity, "is by no means secure so long as you have a majority similar in composition, in aspiration and in political knowledge and enlightenment to the majority which at present sits at Westminster." Yet a couple of decades has not passed since Liberals everywhere rejoiced in the fact that Mr. Asquith himself had intellectually slain Protection; and did not the Liberal majority which entered into possession of the seats at Westminster in 1906 bury the hated thing by formal resolution? Whence this resurrection? Who or what has dug up the corpse, breathed the breath of life into it again, and proved the burial to be the very mockery of Liberal hope and aspiration?

The idea that Free Trade is in danger by the existence of this Parliament is just about as absurd as the contention put forward fourteen years ago that it was assured by the composition of the Parliament of that day. It is clear that there is something lacking in Liberal Free Trade or that Liberal leaders have still to put the case in its proper perspective. The fact is that Liberal Free Trade is insecure for one main reason, and that is that it is but a partial application of the principle. It is Free Trade limited to exchange, unconnected and divorced completely from its counterpart, Free Trade in production. The experience of Liberal Free Trade is that it has enriched the owners of the raw material of industry at the expense of the whole community. Richard Cobden saw this and plainly put before the public the right course to steer. "You who shall liberate the land," he declared, "will do more for your country than we who have liberated its trade"; and when he realized that the economic advantages of his own emancipating policy would not go to the mass of the people, but would inhere in the higher value of the land, he boldly called for "a re-valuation of the land and for taxation to be put upon that value in proportion to the wants of the State."

The belief in Protection prevails and will continue to prevail and to menace the position that Cobden won so long as land monopoly continues to draw to its beneficiaries in higher charges for land the earnings

of industry, and the owners of land are permitted by law to shut down on labour the natural opportunities to employment. Property in land is the chief cause of unemployment. Under such a dispensation there is not enough work to go round, and the idea arises and grows that goods manufactured and imported from abroad lessen the demand for home labour. Of course it is a delusion, and one that can be readily enough dispelled; but it holds its own and continues to torment the Free Traders in every land. Mr. Bonar Law had more than an inkling of this "truth" when he declared that two bad winters would bring the demand for Tariff Reform to the front of the stage. Liberal Free Trade is marked down a failure because notwithstanding its vogue the mass of the people live in circumstances of destitution and despair, in want, and in the fear of want. In the 1909 Budget the door was opened for the necessary and long overdue extension of the Free Trade principle; how that door was shut, bolted and barred against those who stood with Cobden for the greater liberation has been fully revealed in these columns.

The Paisley Policy concerns itself with National Finance. "We must reduce our expenditure, cease borrowing, practise severe retrenchment and seek our revenues from right sources. We must also keep faith with the public creditor who has lent money to the State in times of need and emergency, and we must never forget our obligations to the pensioners, the ex-Service men; and, upon the civil side, of the veterans of industry, the old age pensioners." The right sources for the necessary revenue are land values (just a modest contribution!), war profits and an inquiry into the proposal for a capital levy. It is not explained how we are to keep faith with those who have lent money to the State and at the same time tax them on war profits which they have put into the war loan. But that is a detail.

On Land Values Taxation Mr. Asquith gives a passing nod to the abortive Land Duties of the 1909 Budget. He is afraid that these Duties are at this moment in some little jeopardy. We believe they are, and we have done our best to put them quite beyond the pale of controversy. As we never tire explaining, these Duties are not the Taxation of Land Values, they are not what was promised the adherents of this policy, and they seem to have been invented for the express purpose of silencing the demand for the deeper cut. As we write we learn from the London correspondent of the Australian ARGUS that "the primary cause of the house famine is the Finance Act of 1909-10 and the Taxation of Land Values which discouraged investments in house property and paralyzed the building trade." That is the story of the People's Budget that is noised abroad, and Mr. Asquith meets the charge by a flat denial that there is any truth in the allegation. There is too much truth in it, but let him argue the case with the men whose business it was to finance the building trade.

In the Paisley Policy Mr. Asquith devotes one chapter or one speech to Housing. "The principle of the Budget," he asserts, "was to tax land that is not being used and so to force it to be used for building and for other useful purposes." To put it no higher this is an incorrect statement. It was the principle underlying one of the Duties, the so-called undeveloped Land Duty, now defunct, and how this was emasculated by exemptions and abatements can be verified by Blue Book

Cd. 7315. As for the Increment Duty and the Reversion Duty they rest on no principle; they are expedients, and futile ones at that, for raising revenue. They have no relation whatever to the Taxation of Land Values.

The Paisley Policy takes a weird enough look at the Land Question, a halting, meaningless and cold acknowledgment that it is just possible there may be a half something in the subject with a sort of promise that if ever the Liberals come to power there will be some attempt at a modified rate and tax on Land Values. Mr. Asquith in reply to the Scottish League said he would make Land Values not *the* basis but "a basis" of local rating, and the ink is scarcely dry on the pages of the Paisley Policy when two of his supporters, Messrs. Runciman and Holmes, Liberal candidates at the two Edinburgh bye-elections, both explicitly state that if returned "they would use their full Parliamentary influence forthwith to empower local authorities to substitute land value rating for the present combined value rating." What about the Liberal attitude here? Manifestly the answer to the two Liberal candidates is that they are free to speak for themselves, but that their leader openly refuses to countersign their pledges.

It is a repetition of the story of Liberal pledges these past twenty years. Elections were won by Liberals who believed in the Taxation of Land Values and who taught it in all its fullness as a sound Liberal doctrine; but when the testing time of legislative enactment came it was the leaders who refused to apply the true principle. Mr. Asquith asks for support for his Liberal candidates because he feels the need of additional debating strength in the House of Commons. At Paisley he carried the Taxation of Land Values to the mill girls, but in his messages to the Liberal candidates at Camberwell, Edinburgh and other places, as at his own public meetings since the question is completely set aside, while the curtain is rung up on a wordy duel between the Prime Minister and Mr. Asquith as to their relative claim to Liberal leadership. Mr. Asquith says: "I led you into the war." Mr. Lloyd George replies: "I led you into the peace." Which is the worse calamity will doubtless continue to be subject of much apparent doubt and misapprehension. The people are bewildered with policies and negations, and by way of a diversion they are provided with something in the nature of a circus entertainment.

On the land question, which the Liberals not so long ago pointed to in uncompromising terms, as the place where the root of the matter was to be found we are given a formula that takes us far behind the ramparts which Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman successfully assailed in 1906. Under Mr. Asquith's régime the ground gained then and since has been lost, and Liberals are coldly invited to begin again from the beginning. We protest against this backsliding, and we appeal with confidence to our people wherever they are to be found, in the Liberal Party or outside, to be constant in their allegiance and in their propaganda to the full principle of equal rights to land, and for an application of the practical policy that will find concrete expression in a wider field of employment, higher wages and in a more equitable distribution of wealth as the stepping stone to higher purpose and achievement.

J. P.