



## LAND & LIBERTY

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### THE TREND OF EVENTS

The power of a special interest, though inimical to the general interest, so to influence common thought as to make fallacies pass as truths, is a great fact without which neither the political history of our own time and people nor that of other times and peoples can be understood. A comparatively small number of individuals brought into virtual though not necessarily formal agreement of thought and action by something that makes them individually wealthy without adding to the general wealth, may exert an influence out of all proportion to their numbers. A special interest of this kind is, to the general interests of society, as a standing army is to an unorganized mob. It gains intensity and energy in its specialization, and in the wealth it takes from the general stock finds power to mould opinion.

Now, if we consider it, injustice and absurdity are simply different aspects of incongruity. That which to right reason is unjust must be to right reason absurd. But an injustice that impoverishes the many to enrich the few shifts the centres of social power, and thus controls the social organs and agencies of opinion and education. Growing in strength and acceptance by what it feeds on, it has only to continue to exist to become at length so vested or rooted, not in the constitution of the human mind itself, but in that constitution of opinions, beliefs and habits of thought which we take, as we take our mother tongue, from our social environment, that it is not perceived as injustice or absurdity, but seems even to the philosopher an integral part of the natural order, with which it were as idle if not as impious to quarrel as with the constitution of the elements. Even that highest gift, the gift of reason, is in its bestowal on man subjected to his use, and the very mental qualities that enable us to discover truth may be perverted to fortify error, and are always so perverted wherever an anti-social special interest gains control of the thinking and teaching functions of society.—Henry George, *The Science of Political Economy*, Book II. chapter 2.

The utter helplessness of society as seen in the moral and material strivings of its chief men and

time-honoured agencies to better the lot of the common people goes without saying. In all civilized life poverty is ever and always on the doorstep of progress, and every effort made to sever the connection only brings the stewardship into so much more disrepute. In the circumstances unrest, friction and sedition are at work daily and hourly eating into the flimsy fabric of party ties and alignments. Conservatives, Liberals and Socialists organize in vain against the tendency. The coming change-over to something different is demonstrably clear to all, except perhaps to the deluded, and the partisans of all parties, who are disposed to take motion to mean progress. But such men, be they never so active or benevolent at this, that or the other bend of the stream, do not count for much. They are not the current; they merely denote the drift of the current, and anyone is free to judge for himself the value of their advice or exhortations.

The facts are that Conservatives now claim to be the only true and reliable defenders of the democratic State, seeking as best they may to keep things together in the interests of those who, to quote the jargon of the day, would suffer most in any decline of trade and commerce. In this they have usurped the position of the Liberals who in former days fought and subdued the Conservative opposition to political innovation. The brilliant campaign for the Land Value policy initiated and promoted with so much settled conviction by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, in the hands of his successors ended in the 1909 fiasco. The pledge to the country was a far-reaching measure of land reform so that the working classes might benefit in both town and country. The promise to the municipalities given in set terms, was that these weighty kingdoms of industry and social life would be given the power to levy on the value of land for their special and urgent needs. In the words of Lord Oxford, speaking for the Prime Minister, twenty-one years ago, it was to be no "piecemeal instalment," but a measure that once and for all would establish the rights of the community in the communal value of the land and put a period to the unbridled power and cruelty of land monopoly. The failure to implement the promise, according to Mr Lloyd George, and he ought to know, lies with the vested interests attached to the Party. If Land Valuation only had come out of the People's Budget what a difference it would have made to the public interest and to the fortunes of the Liberal Party. Local authorities as in other places so circumstanced would have put the valuation to use. To quote Mr Lloyd George again: That was the intention. As a consequence, the price of land would have fallen; housing relieved of the burden of oppressive taxation would have developed independent of subsidies, railway extensions and road-making would have enriched the people as a whole instead of the land speculator; there would have been little or no unemployment. These were the friendly dispositions inherent in the land value policy, explicitly upheld and implicitly implied on ten thousand Liberal platforms: and when it came to naught is there any wonder that the party was forsaken by its main body of supporters?

The Labour Party has taken the place in

the fight for social regeneration the Liberals but yesterday so proudly and defiantly occupied; yet the change-over has not settled any question. The Communists are now considered if not a considerable element in the strife, and they are driving the Socialists hard, just as the Socialists were wont to drive the Liberals. The problem to be solved is economic in character and incidence, and in matters of taxation, housing, work and wages there is no line of demarcation to separate one political party from another. They are together in their ambition to cope successfully with the effects of social maladjustments, heedless of the cause or causes that produce them. They are all three out with their amendments to economic law, and industry one way or another has to pay for the interference.

The politicians talk at large about the failure of private enterprise, yet without the financial help of this failure their own dear, blundering schemes could never get beyond the paper stage. The housing subsidy works out at £13 per annum a house, and the rate burden on each house built averages an equal amount. But the innocents will be permitted to pass the time with any absurdity so long as the publicly earned value of land is left intact for "the special interest that is inimical to the general interest."

It has now become an acquired habit on the part of Liberals who take the plunge into the ranks of the Socialists to pass sentence of death on private enterprise. As a rule it provides them with their income but never a one deems it necessary to cut the connection; as an experience it is the means whereby the Socialist pro-poverty schemes are maintained. God help Socialism and Liberalism, and there is something good in both, the day that private enterprise fails to respond to the needs of society. Without its conquering zeal and nourishing service civilization itself would wither and decay. It is not private enterprise in industry and commerce that is to blame for the condition of affairs, but the lack of it and its sterling qualities in the political arena.

In the abstract, Liberals and Socialists pay homage to the land value policy, but when the occasion comes for an application of the principle to any cognate piece of legislation the idea is calmly ignored in a scramble after money for social reform. With few exceptions it is left to the United Committee and its associated Leagues to denounce the backsliding. In all such cases loyal party men do not take kindly to our criticism and some there are who, holding to the land values faith, can yet wax indignant at any gesture of ours to tell aloud how the practice falls short of the profession. We sympathize with our friends who, for reasons which they can advance with amiable logic, cling to their party, right or wrong. It is their affair, but we hold ourselves free to examine the merits of any proposal and to instruct our public accordingly; we have no party affiliations, nor do we seek any such encumbrance.

The general strike last summer ended, as it began,

in doubt and deep dejection. But when the blind lead the blind, shall they not both fall into the ditch? The strike, whatever other impression it made, dealt faithfully with the hopes and aspirations of those who believed in one big Union of workers organized to raise their status through a staggering blow at the "capitalist system." It was the "all or nothing" plan of campaign, and as usual it was nothing. The capitalist system may be fitted, or altered, so to better the condition of labour but the alteration can only be secured through an understanding of how it is entrenched in the monopoly of natural resources.

There is a peculiar unteachable type of mind in all parties which affects the belief that we live mainly in an industrial mechanical age and that the land question has little or no correspondence with it. The short reply to such a contention is to ask: where do the engineer and the manufacturer get their raw material? Where is the location on which their factories must stand? What ransom is not paid unremittingly for that opportunity? As the evangelist would say, he who would abstract the land question from the labour question must be "born again." Yet notwithstanding all that has been written and spoken on the subject the opinion seems to prevail. The opportunities to employment are not provided by Parliament but by nature or by God's decree. They cannot be increased or diminished by legal enactment, but the supply can be narrowed that way, and it is this restriction that constitutes the standing menace to peace and goodwill in industry. Legislation can remove the barriers everywhere but that means analysis of economic phenomena and a fight against odds. It is so much more comfortable to be persuaded that capital and labour are not, after all, in real conflict, that their interests are identical, and that, despite the imperfections of the combatants, good trade waits on efficiency and prosperity on both.

But the politicians are taking no chances and the story now is that Parliament, not being free to enact the necessary legislation to bring peace in industry, and incapable of considering the case even if it were free to take action, some other authority must be brought into being and the demand comes seriously for a brand new piece of machinery to be named and known as the Industrial Parliament. The thought runs on parallel lines with the League of Nations and the spirit of Locarno is again summoned to the rescue of a perplexed and strike-worn people. Mr Arthur Henderson, M.P., Secretary of the Labour Party, publicly invites the Prime Minister to take the initiative and Mr Clynes, M.P., says it would be wise to appoint the Speaker as the Chairman in the beginning. Mr Frank Hodges, Secretary of the International Miners' Federation, thinks the idea an admirable one, and adds: "It is only when the actual representatives of industry get together in the manner suggested that we are likely to have any practical results. It is the only way to translate into real value the pious aspirations some of us have indulged in for a considerable time." To which we would remark, it is a pity Mr Hodges cannot now translate those pious aspirations into

real value, if only for the benefit of the class he seeks to serve.

Mr Appleton, Secretary, General Federation of Trade Unions, is against the idea. He says: "Talk of this kind rouses desires among the people which cannot be gratified. There's got to be more work and less talk. We must get a real understanding, and when we have got that understanding, start afresh." We would respectfully urge that if there was more *thought* and less talk the legitimate desires of the people could be roused to some good understanding, without which, as Mr Appleton wisely divines, an Industrial Parliament is a sheer waste of time and temper.

There are other voices for and against this variation and the Liberal party have a research committee hard at work on labour problems and how to solve them. It is all very enterprising though highly suggestive of the decline and fall of the old firm. In effect it means that the Parliament we know and possess has too big an electorate and that one with a more restrictive franchise is wanted, if industry is to flourish and the workmen to have a square deal. It means that on the hustings those who promised so much if their party was returned to power have discovered that the House of Commons as constituted cannot deliver the goods and they propose to erect a more amenable debating chamber. The humour of the situation surely lies in the fact that the same men who sit in the Commons with the ideas that now possess them are they who will occupy the front seats and lead the conversations in the new temple of wisdom. We are in agreement with Mr Appleton in his wise reflection but is there anything to stop the advance of this latest futility? It allows the politicians to escape the condemnation of their supporters; it will appeal to those who hold that Parliament has too much to do, as it has, in directing and misdirecting wider issues, and it is in keeping with the expressed desire of those who stand for the overthrow of Parliamentary authority. The idea is in complete harmony with the trend of events out of which will come an acceptance of some sort of crude communism or a radical step forward to a new and a higher civilization.

In the surging and confusing thought of the day the cause of international friendship and goodwill is not just holding its own. It cannot be otherwise with the inside struggle in the various homelands to make ends meet. Everywhere the "foreigner" is spoken of and pointed at as he who is after the other man's job, and how to overcome the advance of this "competitor" with his lower cost of living, and his ingenious devices for getting into neutral markets is current talk in industrial and political circles. The race for contracts and concessions may be inevitable, but if so how the Locarno ethic is ever to bring brotherly love out of it all is a problem by itself. Perhaps the coming economic Conference at Geneva will take the case in hand. In the light of the Bankers' Manifesto the Conference can hitch its waggon to a star.

The demand of the worker for a higher standard of comfort is not to be denied; and as we are well advised it is out of new production that higher wages are to be expected. As platform and press

agree low production necessarily implies low wages, but it does not follow that high production means high wages and this is where the fallacy appears. It is the workman's experience that high production does not mean a relatively higher reward for him and the facts of the case are in union with the logic. By all means let us lay claim to the highest possible production; but if peace in industry is the objective let provision be made at the same time for an equitable distribution. Low paid labour means discontent, friction and slow progress, just as high paid labour takes us in the opposite direction. As Henry George puts it: "Where wages are high there will the brain best guide the hand."

What is urgent is a positive policy that will put an end to the "stoppage of production" that is so carefully and sedulously kept in the background of public discussion. The Chancellor of the Exchequer knows that a Budget tax on land values means new life to industry, and how in this freedom quantity and quality would quickly follow. He is lectured by the quidnuncs to practice economy, but he knows that rent is, naturally, ready to advance on any saving he can effect; he knows his law of rent and how it can be turned from a curse into a blessing. Has he the moral courage to explain what the obstacles are to this beneficent change? He revels in denunciation of communism and all its works. It is all very well staged, but underneath the rhetoric there is the social injustice upon which communism feeds and grows.

J. P.

## ERRATUM

In our issue of last month, page 20, the results of the Danish General Election of 2nd December, 1926, were compared with those of the Election of 11th April, 1924. In the headings to the columns of the table, these dates were by mistake transposed.

**Book Received.**—FAMILY VIEWS OF TOLSTOY. Edited by Aylmer Maude. George Allen & Unwin. 10s. 6d. net.—This book is written chiefly by members of Tolstoy's own family, and gives a better and more intimate idea of him than anything that has appeared of recent years. Its articles deal with him in relation to Music, Dickens, Humour, the Land with the Original of Natasha Rostov, and gives the first precise account of his "Home-Leaving and Death." A special chapter contains the article "How my Father and I Dealt with the Land Question," by Countess Tatiana Tolstoy, first published in the August, 1926, issue of *Land & Liberty*.

By HENRY GEORGE

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