

## LAND & LIBERTY

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### UNEMPLOYMENT

As we write industrial unrest has broken out again in the form of a menacing strike in the coal-mining industry. The miners have been on strike for a week or more, and in addition to their own suspension hundreds of thousands of workers have been committed to the ranks of the unemployed. This sort of unemployment is abnormal, and can be adjusted when the parties to the dispute come to terms. The coal-mining industry is a primary one, all other industries being dependent on it for supplies, without which they come to a standstill. It is a case of no coal no anything, and the stoppage brings out, sharply enough, the nature and character of our industries.

The land question was unearthed at the Sankey Commission last year, and its relationship to the working of the coal mines fully and piquantly exposed. For days and weeks the inquiry held sway in the Press, and who concerned can forget the fierce light, to say nothing of the heat, that beat upon the royalty owners as they explained how they came by the coal, how much they were taking from the industry and how little they were giving in return. The Commission revealed the coal question to be a land question, and at the close of the proceedings the miners' leader had to lament the fact that he and his associates had paid so little heed in the past to the wider issue.

Be that as it may, there are people to be found in all circles of advanced thought, speakers and writers, who deny explicitly and implicitly the importance of the land question. They have a creed of their own which in devious ways mixes up land and capital together, and which goes to show that while land was once the mainstay of industry it has become, with the development of the "capitalist system," of less and less importance, until now land reform, as such, is not worth an intelligent person's consideration. So is the story told; but coal, ironstone, slatstone, clay, etc., are stubborn facts which go always to prove the contrary view, and industry in all its features, complex or simple, is resolved, in the final analysis, into a land question. Industry is foundationed on monopoly, and those who profit by monopoly are beyond the reach of any labour organization, so long as thought on labour questions, ignoring root causes, goes scampering after effects. It is in the constitution of things that land is a dominant and not a derivative factor in the production of wealth. This is a truth that requires no reasoned explanation or defence. It is a dogma of political economy, and those who would

gainsay it must beg no question but come prepared to show how man can manufacture square yards or acres of land as he requires them.

Of course we realize in presenting this view of the matter that we are rather firesome people, one-idea'd out-of-date cranks and all the rest; but what can we do, possessed as we are with a belief that man is a land animal and that the land question is the bottom question, in the twentieth century, as in the first?

How to deal with the unemployed apart from any temporary stoppage of industry is the vexed question of the hour, and all sorts of remedies are under review. In the popular mind, as with those who profess to have given the subject some consideration, the accepted theory appears to be that naturally there is not enough work to go round. As a rule this theory is not advanced in so many words, it comes out rather in the schemes promoted to make good the "niggardliness of Nature." There is a scarcity of work, and instead of inquiring into the cause of it we have a Right to Work Bill promoted. This is where the initial blunder is made. No man has a right to demand work from another; just as no man, or Government, has a right to compel another to work against his will. The right to work inheres in the man, naturally, and its correlative is the duty of organized society to see that this right is not infringed. The idea of a man begging work from anyone in a world teeming with good things suggests that someone or something is standing between him and natural opportunities.

Land monopoly is the one great denial of the Right to Work, and so long as it holds sway economic forces will provide society with its unemployed problem. "Nature," says an authority on the condition of the people question, "owes to man a storehouse, which shall never fail him, for the daily supply of his daily wants, and this she has given in the inexhaustible resources of the soil." The people have been disinherited from this storehouse. We live in an age of industry, we are frequently reminded, and the reminder tends to take the eyes of the worker away from the land question to questions that arise solely because the natural gateways to employment are locked against him.

A primary cause of the trouble, we are assured by the Press and the platform, is the tyranny of trade unionists who fence themselves in and other workers out, and further that, not content with this selfish policy, they go slow, and in a calculated manner reduce the output. If this charge can be justified let us pay heed to the circumstances before we pass judgment. It does not lie in the mouth of those who defend the existing economic system, in which the worker is barred out from the natural field of employment, to condemn the trade unionist for paying special regard to what he considers to be his own interest. If there is only a certain amount of work available at any time it surely follows that the worker is more than likely to conclude that in the interest of his fellows, no less than his own, he had better ca' canny. The main argument behind the demand for an eight-hour day was that room might be provided for the unemployed man. It was a false argument. The eight-hour day is here and the unemployed still haunt the gates of factory and workshop.

It is a question of organization we are told, but there seems no common agreement as to what kind of organization would solve the problem. In the ill-digested thought

that rages round the question of unemployment there is an idea that the Municipality or the Government should do the organizing. But the opportunities to employment are not in the hands of any Government, they are in the land, and all that is wanted of the Government are laws that would free the land from the bondage of monopoly. With economic freedom the workers are capable of organizing themselves, far more capable than any number of bureaucrats.

In a leading article the DAILY HERALD the other day, reviewing the House of Commons debate on the "Emergency Powers Bill," which is popularly known as the daughter of the war "Dora," says: "It is the old dilemma. If the workers do *not* strike, the capitalists, and the Government, which does the will of the capitalists, will force down their standard of living below that which prevailed before the war (the resistance to the miners' claim is a clear and unanswerable instance of this on the Government's own official figures): but if, on the other hand, they *do* strike, they are to be regarded as enemies and fought with all the resources of the State."

The same old misfit. The capitalists force down the standard of living only in the sense that the out-of-works at the factory gate force it down; the question is what is behind these forces. Capital by itself has no power to force anything anywhere, nor have capitalists any such power. The struggle is between monopoly and labour; the fight between capital and labour is merely the outward sign that something else is at work. The truth is that labour is ground between the upper millstone of land monopoly and the nether millstone of material progress. This is the old dilemma, and all other interpretations of it are as fallacious as they are misleading.

The cure of the Government of the day is relief works and the making of new roads. But will not the cost of these undertakings work out at the expense of the taxpayer? Will the purchasing power of the taxpayer not be reduced to the extent of the levy? If he pays a pound to make a road that is a pound he will not spend on calling upon some labour in some other direction. A pound is equal to a pound's worth of labour service, equal to that amount and no more; and while an unemployed man is taken on at the roadside some other worker, making boots, for example, is cast adrift. But there is one class who will gain by this scheme, the owners of the land, through which the new roads are cut, as well as on either side of the improvement.

The latest cure for unemployment is that each industry should be made to support its own unemployed. The MANCHESTER GUARDIAN favours this scheme and affirms that it is rapidly coming into favour. It is included in the brand-new Industrial Policy of the Manchester Liberal Association, and it finds, we are informed, supporters in every party. No chance for land reform here, not even a sporting chance. The people are robbed of their rights in the land, and the communal value attaching to land, brought into existence by the very presence and industry of the people, is not to be levied upon for the maintenance of the unemployed the monopoly creates. This public fund growing with the growth of industry is to remain the perquisite of the monopolist, and the industrious classes are to have cast upon them a burden the existence of

which by no stretch of imagination can be traced to their door.

And how will this new and popular idea be translated into law? Is it not just the sort of burden that will be passed on to the consumer in higher prices? Mr. Bevan, the Dockers' Union Secretary, already gives the answer to this pertinent question. He suggests a levy of fourpence a ton on imports and exports handled at the docks. It is clear that just as the scheme of National Insurance was passed on to the consumer so will this additional charge for this new popular scheme be passed on. Instead of minimising unemployment such a scheme is far more likely to increase it. But it stands to be condemned on other grounds. It is the open door to protection. The tariff reformer will agree that industry must carry this burden, and he will want to make the foreigner pay. Those who want and who need the benefits of this popular scheme will not be over particular as to who pays, so long as they are protected from the horrors of unemployment. And in their dire necessity who shall blame them if they listen to a plan that promises to give all the work to themselves and none to any outsider?

We live in an age when work is an end in itself to millions, and not as a means to an end, and if we refuse to enfranchise the people actually as well as in name, enfranchise them in a way that would open every avenue to the production of wealth and to its equitable distribution, we must face the consequences. The sooner we resolve to challenge the monopoly that is responsible for bad trade and unemployment the better it will be for sound finance, free trade and more cherished institutions.

J. P.

## RATING REVOLUTION

### Manchester Scheme to Tax Land Values

FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.

*Daily News, Manchester, Monday, October 25th.*

A revolution in municipal rating is foreshadowed by the decision of the Manchester City Council to apply for Parliamentary powers to levy rates on 5 per cent. of the capital value of land within the borough. The total value of the land available for such rating is estimated at £100,000,000. The council propose to levy rates on 5 per cent. of this value; that is, on £5,000,000. Taking the city's estimates for 1920-1921 as a basis, this year's rate would produce £4,000,000; so that a rate of 12s. in the £ would amply provide all the money required.

Mr. Thomas F. Tweed, who, as secretary of the Manchester Liberal Federation, has been intimately concerned with the scheme, prophesied to a DAILY NEWS representative to-day that the direct result of such a rate would be to abolish immediately the payment of rates on houses, offices, factories, shops, and all buildings.

"The existing system of local taxation, while letting the landowners escape their fair share, penalizes industry and directly encourages unsightly buildings and unhealthy conditions of labour."