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Editorial Offices:

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

All communications to be addressed to the Editor.

Telegrams: "Eulav, Vic, London." Telephone: Victoria 7525.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND LAND MONOPOLY

The gathering force of unemployment has burst upon us like a rain storm, and the menacing feature of it lies in the dismal admission that there is no sign of any immediate abatement. It is not confined to any one country—it is everywhere, acting and reacting throughout the wide ramifications of trade and commerce. As we go to press the daily papers report that in this country one million unemployed and another half million or more on short time.

The trade barometer indicates rather a backward than a forward movement, and in a more or less frenzied manner the usual crop of ineffective schemes have been dressed up and offered for consumption, hot from the printing press and the burning indignation of the platform.

Apart from grants of money and the appointment of a special Committee, the Government plan takes the form of a call to employers and employees to give the unemployed a share of the work in hand. The idea appears to be that the employed should content themselves with half work and half pay so that every idle man or woman may be taken in. This venture appeals strongly to a visitor from the North, who says there are any number of unemployed politicians about; let us have two Prime Ministers, two Chancellors of the Exchequer, two Ministers of Health, double the number of Members of Parliament, and so on. Then at Whitehall we might halve the hours of service, duplicate the number of administrators; for every postman and policeman two could fall in to the day's round. Why not? Let those who preach this sermon put it into practice as an example to all the others.

The Labour Party have not taken kindly to this plan, not this time, and have gone out on their own. They demand, among other things, a 44-hour week, drastic measures for limiting overtime, the putting in hand, by the Government, of such work as road-making, afforestation, and foreshore reclaiming, constructional work on railways, waterways and harbours, and each unemployed man and woman to have as maintenance £2 and £1 5s. a week respectively with proportional aid for the under-employed.

As for the money necessary to finance these undertakings, to say nothing of the absence of houses for the workers who are to do the road-making, etc., the Labour Committee point out

that this can be provided by the very economies that are necessary for the restoration of trade, and if further expenditure is necessary it must be undertaken.

The Government and the Labour Committee are evading the issue. What is wanted is not work, but the opportunity to work. That is the missing link, and until it is recognised and placed in position all else is so much talk that darkens counsel by words without wisdom. The opportunities to work are at our feet and in abundance, all we shall ever have or see on this earth. It would be an altogether different kind of social life to the one we enjoy or endure, if the wide field for the production of food to eat and raiment to wear were the gifts of the Government, even if it were one composed of supermen instead of the usual collection of puffed-up mediocrities.

"Capitalism" is held to be the root of the matter, but in as much as capital itself is correctly described as that part of wealth which is set aside to assist labour in further production, and in as much as society could not very well exist without the use of capital, capitalism, so named, must stand for something else. It is, in fact, another name for monopoly. But, however we name it, let us clearly grasp the exact meaning the word seeks to convey to our mind, what it stands for in the argument.

If it be true that unemployment is the outcome of capitalism, it is no less true that capitalism has its roots in an unemployed class. If there were no unemployed, capitalism could not keep from labour its full reward. When the necessities of the war made labour scarce wages went up by leaps and bounds. It was not the high prices of goods that forced wages up, it was the fact that labour was a scarce commodity. War or no war it is the man at the gate who fixes the wages of those inside, and this every well-informed labour man and every employer knows to be true.

Wages are determined by the number of labourers seeking employment, in relation to the number of available opportunities open to labour. There may be other causes to compute in this crisis, or in any similar one, but they can be classed as of a minor and ephemeral character. Land is the key to the solution of the problem. As Henry George says: "It is a well provisioned ship, this on which we sail through space. If the bread and beef above decks seem to grow scarce, we but open a new hatch and there is a new supply, of which before we never dreamed. And very great command over the services of others come to those who as the hatches are opened are permitted to say: This is mine!"

This explains in a sentence the essence of capitalism. Knowledge grows and invention comes revealing additional supplies of which before we never dreamed; and rent, the price paid the owner of the hatches for liberty to dig and delve and carry the goods to their final destination, begins at once to swallow up the increase. The monopolist class wins through at the expense of both labour and capital, and poverty keeps pace with progress. The "get off" order is the top end of capitalism; its counterpart is the open sore of unemployment.

This is all very well said, and may be true enough, say many who are under the spell of more glittering schemes that promise quick returns. To such

people the freeing of industry from the shackles of monopoly is a big task, it is not practical politics, and there are lions in the way. Therefore they take an easy means of escape on to more accommodating ground, but as a rule it is ground that is in occupation by the interests. The two "opposing forces" meet at a conjunction and together strengthen the main stream of opinion against radical land reform. Immediate plans may bring some labour some relief, but, it is the kind of relief that feeds the prisoner while denying him his freedom to get out and look after himself.

The Labour Party chastise the Government roundly for failing to take their advice given in 1917 to the effect that the Government should put in hand directly or through the local authority such urgently-needed public works as housing, training colleges, new roads, light railways, the reorganisation of the canal system, etc. Again in 1918 the Party resolved that it is the duty of the Ministry before demobilisation is actually begun to arrange the next year's programme of national and local government works. The resolution declared this to be all that is required to prevent the occurrence of any widespread or lasting unemployment.

This advice has all the appearance of a courageous and well-thought-out policy, but it begs the question in the implied assumption that there is no natural remedy for unemployment, and that Government grants of money is all that is required to put the policy into practice. It is as idle to talk of taking in the unemployed at road-making at the expense of the general taxpayer, for that is what the policy amounts to, as it is to attempt the solution of housing problem while we tax houses 50 to 100 per cent. on their annual value.

Obsessed with the idea of smashing capitalism by the conquest of political power the Labour Party wilfully ignore the land question. They have no definite land policy, and have come along so far on the bald assertion that there is no vital difference between land and capital, and that the term capitalism answers for both. Capitalism is evidently the combined forces of land and capital—land that is provided by nature, and capital which can be produced as it is required.

Capitalism, so shaped and placed for purposes of argument or inference calculated to enlighten the inquiring mind, is an economic curiosity which one sweep of well-directed thought would hustle off the stage. Manifestly all that is required is to squeeze out of the imposture its monopoly claims and nothing will be left except what must benefit labour. But its critics and calumniators, those who take it as a serious proposition, and who live to see it wiped off the map, work to this end for what they term the "conquest of political power." But why should the unemployed wait on this conquest when a tax on land values will set them firmly on their feet right away? The tax will do this because, unlike all other forms of taxation, it will destroy the *economic power* of the monopolists. It will cheapen land and raise wages, and the local rating of land values with the unrating of improvements will as quickly end the house famine.

As to the conquest of political power, how is it working in Central Europe? There they have had their political revolution. The old regime has gone

and the people enjoy the fullest measure of political power. Politically they are free to do what they choose to do and nothing happens. It cannot be the want of credits or such like scraps of paper, nor can it be because capital is scarce, for capital is produced by labour applied to land and there is land in abundance. It is apparent that even with fully captured political power nothing can be done if the people do not understand how to achieve economic freedom.

The Labour Party call, rightly enough, for complete restoration of peace conditions, and for the immediate signature of the Russian Trade Agreement. But what bearing has this on the bottom cause of unemployment? In pre-war times there was unemployment and unless a change in thought takes place there will be unemployment after the Russian Agreement is signed and passes into history.

What are the municipalities doing? a correspondent asks. Is a Bill in preparation for the Rating of Land Values, and if not, why not? That is a question we pass on to our co-workers who serve on local councils with the suggestion that the time is ripe and over-ripe for a Municipal Conference on the subject. Meanwhile, Mr. Bevin, at the Tramways Court of Inquiry appointed by the Ministry of Labour to consider the demand of tramway workers for an advance of wages, has just told us what the municipalities have done with the tramway profits.

The tramway services, he said, had increased land values, an item in the finance of the business that was quietly ignored, though duly pocketed by the landowners along the routes and at the various termini. This is bad enough, but in some instances the profits of the service were handed over in relief of rates. From 1905 to 1920 the Manchester City tramways contributed £1,338,872 to the relief of rates; and in 1920 the Leeds tramways £137,000. That simply means that the money that might have been given to the tramway workers in increased wages was earmarked as a yearly grant to the local landowners; the less the tenant paid in rates the higher the rent of land.

Mr. Bevin is to be warmly congratulated in thus publicly exposing the scandal of a municipal practice which took from the worker what was his right, and gave it to the idler in the attempt to curry favour with the indignant ratepayer.

Meanwhile, what are the Single Taxers doing or thinking to do to put forward their ideas and practical proposals? The Single Taxer knows what is wrong or professes to know. He must not keep this knowledge to himself, but take it out into the open streets, and wherever he can find a place in which his voice can be heard to any purpose.

The Single Taxer knows why the world is sick, what healthy life might be and that it is here for the asking. There is nothing mysterious about unemployment to him, and he has the means at hand in so much informing literature to make his friends and neighbours understand the plain truth of the matter. What is wanted is a conception of honest labour under free conditions.

We live in an age of disappointment, but to the Single Taxer an age of promise as well. Let us now, more than ever before, make clear the fundamental truth that land monopoly is the abiding obstacle to progress.

J. P.