

## Land Question In Recent British Elections

“IN spite of all the advances towards the taxation of land values since the days of Henry George, the great liberating movement to which he gave such an impetus has moved but slowly. George himself, it seems to me, is partly responsible for the time and effort that has been wasted on trivialities, since he advocated a somewhat timid advance along what he mistakenly described as the line of least resistance. . . . The poor showing that the followers of Henry George have made in the United States is largely due, I believe, to efforts wasted upon half measures and indirect attacks.”

FRANK W. GARRISON, in *The Commonwealth*, August 11, 1923.

The “poor showing” is, unfortunately, not confined to the United States. Here in Britain, after 40 years devoted service in earnest, if mistaken, educational effort along that same line of supposed least resistance, it cannot honestly be claimed that the showing is any better. There is no good purpose served in blinking the fact. It were more courageous to admit the mistaken tactics, and more honest. What is the reason for this lack of progress? Mr. Garrison, in the article which we have quoted, goes direct to the point. “The driving power of the Anti-Slavery movement,” he says, “came from the demand for ‘immediate and unconditional emancipation.’ This uncompromising attitude made the assault on the slave system formidable; it left no opportunity open to politicians who would have used the movement for their own purposes, and gave no opening for those who would entangle it in a mass of subtleties.”

• It is recorded in Johnstone’s “History of the Working Classes in Scotland” that “2,000 men joined the Land Restoration League at the conclusion of a meeting at Glasgow addressed by Henry George, who had toured Scotland and fired masses of men with his passion and eloquence, and among those whom he most influenced was James Keir Hardie, the young leader of the Lanarkshire miners.” Unfortunately, the Cause fell into the hands of the politicians. The Land Restoration League became in time the League for the taxation of Land Values, and the great moral issue raised by George, and which was the inspiration of the “passion and eloquence which fired masses of men” who heard him, was soon obscured in a wrangle between Liberal and Tory politicians over a paltry town rate. The Scottish Liberals were quick to use the movement for their own purposes, and, with the assistance of their English brethren, soon had it completely entangled in a mass of subtleties. Indeed, it came to be regarded as an item of Liberal policy (one of many), and this prejudiced its consideration at the hands of all of those who were not of that party. But for this tragedy it is possible that when, in 1893, the Independent

Labor Party was formed by Keir Hardie, Robert Smillie and other earnest radicals, it would have been founded on a definite land restoration basis, with results vastly different from those we now know.

To that mass of subtleties is due the fact that Smillie was prevented until late in life from seeing the cat. Speaking at Newcastle, Staffordshire, in October, 1921, he made this confession: “Late in life I have realized, what I failed to see in the early days, that the root of all social problems lies in the land. So long as land is withheld from free access to men, anxious and willing to utilize Nature’s bounty, just so long will you have a crowd of men at the factory gate waiting for jobs. The key to the anomalies we are all endeavouring to solve is the land problem.” This discovery yet remains to be made by the vast majority of the politicians. These are ready to render lip-service to the land values proposal as a means of catching the votes of a number of “faddists,” as they think, but without for a moment realising that behind this “wrong name for the right thing” as Col. J. C. Wedgwood, M.P., calls it in his recent book, is the greatest revolutionary idea that the world has ever been invited to accept. Presented as a mere fiscal issue—a matter of of variety in taxation method—it cannot inspire that religious fervour and moral enthusiasm which leads men to give their lives for a cause. It was not of the taxation of land values that George wrote that oft-quoted passage “The truth that I have tried to make clear will not find easy acceptance. But it will find friends—those who will toil for it; suffer for it; if need be, die for it. This is the power of truth.”

### LIBERATION: NOT TAXATION.

“While we were discussing taxation, instead of liberation,” again to quote Mr. Garrison, the moral principle behind the movement lost its hold upon us. The reason for the lack of progress is in the timid and mistaken policy of step-by-step. “Immediate and unconditional emancipation” was the demand that won through in the case of the chattel-slaves, and it is the only cry that will win through in this far greater struggle for the freeing of the wage-slaves of the present. In view of the triumph of the forces of reaction in the recent elections both in Britain and the United States, it behooves each and every sincere follower of Henry George to ask “Where are we at”?

### THE POSITION IN GREAT BRITAIN

Here in Britain we have just passed through the third successive General Election in less than two years. After 40 years of propaganda for the Taxation of Land Values, the Land Lord Party is now in power with a majority, only slightly less than that which the Liberals, led by Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman, secured in the political land-slide of 1906. So little did Mr. Stanley Baldwin and his advisers fear the step-by-steppers, that he boldly

announced in his manifesto to the electors that "We are opposed to land nationalization, the taxation of land values, and all schemes of spoliation." For the first time all three parties mentioned the subject in the official pronouncements.

#### LABOR LAND POLICY

The Official Labor Manifesto promised "the taxation of land values, and such a dealing with agricultural land as will secure its maximum productivity, and with urban land and building sites as would protect the occupying tenants and secure its best use." For further light on the precise meaning of this passage we turn to the official leaflet No. 70, issued from Labor Headquarters (published in full in *The Commonweal*, June 28th, 1924) and entitled "The Land for the People," in which we read that "The Labor Party stands for the Taxation of Land Values. That means a tax on the Landlord's Rent. The Landlords get their rent, whether they are employed or unemployed; and they have no tax to pay on what they draw from the People's Land. The Labor Party would tax the Landlords' rent."

Of course, land yielding no rent, however valuable, would be unaffected by this brilliant proposal! The precious leaflet goes on to ask, "Why should the landlord always get something for nothing?" and without answering this pertinent question, says, "If there were a tax on land values, such as the Labor Party proposes, the landlord would pay part of his unearned income for the good of all, Land would be cheaper, there would be more and cheaper houses—and the Nation would have the money to buy out the landlords and give the Land to the People." The smaller wing of the Labor Party, the I. L. P., has a "Land Policy" of its very own. Adopted by the Annual Conference of the Party at York last April, it is called "Socialist Land Policy," and contains the same purchase notion. "Land value taxation should be regarded as a means of collecting the economic rent for the community" we are told, "and when funds are required for purchase . . . they should be raised as far as possible from land revenue as follows: the taxation of land values." It is a queer way of "collecting the economic rent for the community" to propose that it should be given back to the Land Lords in purchase from them of the community's land.

The timidity that fears to challenge a wrong is responsible for these proposals. Never once is the claim of the Land Lords to "own" the People's Land contested. On the contrary, it is admitted by the proposal to purchase it from them. Instead of freeing the slaves, Labor's "tax-and-buy" policy would merely change the form of their bondage. The rent-paying slave of today would be the interest-paying slave of tomorrow—but still a slave. The Land Lord who today gets "something for nothing" and calls it rent, would be the Bond Lord of tomorrow, getting the same "something for nothing"

but calling it interest—but it still would be "something for nothing."

#### LIBERAL LAND POLICY

Bearing the signatures of Mr. Asquith and Mr. Lloyd George, the Liberal Manifesto declares that "Liberalism," in pursuance of its historic role of giving equal opportunities to all classes and of creating the fundamental conditions of economic and social freedom, has a great responsibility for promoting and carrying through great policies of land reform." That this is true of "Liberalism" we readily admit, but it should be remembered that the Liberal Party is not necessarily synonymous with Liberalism.

"The Liberal policy is to liberate farmers from the restrictions of an out-of-date Land system; to liberate agricultural laborers from poverty and lack of opportunity; and to make the best use of all the land of the country in the interest of the whole community." So much for agriculture. For the towns, "Land values, created by the activity and expenditure of the community, must be made to contribute to the expenses of maintaining the conveniences, utilities, and amenities of the town." The "experts" who are advising the Liberal leaders should know that the land values of the country-side are similarly created. Why are they not also to be taken? After a reference to "wiping out" the slums, we find that leasehold enfranchisement is promised.

As a signatory to the present manifesto, Mr. Asquith may be interested in the following expression of opinion on this subject. Speaking on May 18th, 1911, he said, "There is a movement in this country and in Parliament in favor of a scheme of leasehold enfranchisement, but I have always regarded that proposal, not as a solution of the land question but as a great imposture, which, so far from securing to the community the increased value of land, would merely transfer it to a new body of landowners." Since the effect of this proposal would be the same today as when he uttered these words, are we to understand that Mr. Asquith is now deliberately advocating this "great imposture"?

As, with the Labor Party, the interests of the Land Lords are to be protected by provision for Land Purchase, so the Liberal Party stands committed to the same unjust proposal. The muddleheadedness is not confined to any one party.

In amplification of their manifesto, the Liberal Party have issued two special Land Leaflets. No. 2674 is addressed "To All Who Live on Land." "Farming is a business," we read. "It can only be conducted successfully, freed from the restrictions and burdens of ornamental persons and of profit-takers who do not earn their profits." "Under this new Land Policy the State will help to make into cultivating owners all Farmers who are farming well."

"Landowners" (ornamental persons who do not earn their profits) "will be compensated on the fair terms of

receiving for themselves and their heirs the annual payment of their present net rents." "Farmers who are held by competent local experts to be inefficient will be retired." The Cultivating Owner will pay the equivalent of his present net rent. "Farmers who own their land" will be interested in the following remarkable proposal. We are told that "many of these farmers are terribly handicapped. They have to bear heavy annual charges due to having bought at high prices and borrowed at high interest. The State will be ready to buy out such occupying owners *on the basis of the price paid by them.*" After this amazing statement the authors of the leaflet go on to assert that the "Liberal policy of Cultivating Ownership is fair and just to Landowners, but does not burden the nation with the cost of buying them out." This is an Election lie, as foolish as it is false: since any scheme of State purchase must throw the burden of its cost upon the nation. The Leaflet concludes: "In the interests of National welfare, it is imperative that the Land Question shall be grappled with immediately, firmly and boldly." Those responsible for this leaflet should be *bold* enough for anything.

The second of the two leaflets, No. 2673, is addressed "To All Who Live in Towns and Cities." We have supposed that these, too, lived on Land, but let that pass. Under the head of "Land Values" we are told that "The high value of town land has been created not by the landowners, but by the activity of the people of the town as a whole." This is not quite correct. The people living in the remote country districts have contributed to give to the land of London its value ranging up to £6,000,000 per acre. These values, we are told, "should go to the community, and, primarily to the towns which directly produce them." This is quite a mistaken idea, and would, if carried out, perpetuate the present inequalities. London with its very high values, would be in receipt of a large income, while country districts where land value is low would be unable to meet their expenses from the local land value fund. The C. L. P. demand, that all the economic rent (or land value) shall be collected into a common fund and allocated to the municipal authorities on a population basis, is the only just method of distributing this fund which all help to create and maintain.

Agricultural land is to be excluded. But its value is just as much a community created value as that of any town land. The arguments for taking the one apply equally to the other. It is difficult to understand what is meant by the statement that "The continuance of a rise in land values, is, however, against public interest." What *is* against public interest is the taking of this value by private persons. Since the value is created by the presence and activity of the people, it follows that, as their numbers increase and their activities are enlarged, Land Values will rise, and no silly proposal such as the authors of the leaflet make, borrowing the idea from the I. L. P.,

that the present value be "established," will have the slightest effect. It were an easier task to stabilize the weather!

#### CANDIDATES CONFUSE ISSUE

Such were the official declarations of policy made by the leaders of the three parties. Turning to examine the addresses of candidates we find the same confusion of contradictory statements on the subject among the few instances where the land question is mentioned. In the vast majority of cases the candidates would not appear ever to have heard of land. A Front-bench Liberal standing high in the councils of his party is content to remark, near the end of his address:—"We propose to give the cities the fullest possible opportunity of buying land, clearing slums, improving transport and reducing rates on improvements and houses by taxes on the land which contributes now nothing of the values which the Cities themselves created." He was not returned. Another Liberal, prominent in Land Values circles, relegates the subject to the fifth place in his address, where he says:—"The unemployment problem is primarily a land problem. The Liberal industrial policy starts off with the Rating and Taxing of Land Values," and he leaves it at that. He, too, was not returned. A Labor man, also unsuccessful, remarks quite casually, three fourths of the way through a very lengthy address, that "A measure for the Taxation of Land Values is being prepared." These are typical of the many election addresses we have seen, and, taken with the party manifestoes, they reveal a depth of ignorance that is appalling.

Much is sought to be made in some quarters of pledges in favor of the Taxation and Rating of Land Values received from some 515 candidates. In the light of the foregoing it is evident that these are of little worth, since the average politician will pledge himself to anything he considers likely to catch votes. Actually, in the case of the two opposing candidates at Paisley, Mr. Asquith, (Liberal) and Mr. E. R. Mitchell, (Labor) we had two "recognized advocates of the taxation of land values" fighting each other to the death. Mr. Asquith was defeated, and we suppose that this will be regarded as a victory for the policy he advocated. The fact is that after the extremely bitter fight between Liberals and Laborites, whatever co-operation may have been possible between these two parties in the past is now at an end. In these circumstances, only the wilfully blind will believe that the restoration of the land will ever be achieved through any of the existing political parties.

#### MODERN ANTI-SLAVERY MOVEMENT

The "poor showing" that Mr. Garrison deplors in his own country, and which we have to admit on this side of the Atlantic, is undoubtedly due to the unfortunate manner of presentation. The driving power of the unpromising demand for immediate and unconditional

emancipation was lacking, and consequently, the cause has become the plaything of rival factions, concerned only with questions of party advantage. To exhibit the moral principle behind the movement is the privilege and purpose of the Commonwealth Land Party everywhere, hence it is presented not as a fiscal issue, but as the modern Anti-slavery movement.

—J. W. GRAHAM PEACE.

## Florida Moves a Long Step Ahead

THE meeting of state governors recently at Jacksonville, Florida, focused public attention on Florida because we learned, as a result of this meeting, that the state of Florida has, in its constitution, banned two kinds of tax—state inheritance and state income taxes.

"We want people with money to come to Florida and live and die here," one of the state's legislators is quoted in explanation of the action against a state inheritance tax.

In other words, Florida intends to make things comfortable for the most desirable classes of citizens—not for the very rich only, but for the average man and woman who have saved a competence for old age and would spend the rest of their years in peace.

Taxes in Florida are fairly high, due to the many public improvements being made throughout the state. Most of these improvements, however, are of public benefit and do not consist of handsome public buildings but rather of good roads, sanitary drainage, good water supply, the fight against insect pests, fruit diseases, etc. Florida people get something worth while for their tax money, and they are not taxed half a dozen different ways for the same thing.

—EDNA K. WOOLEY in *Cleveland News*

## Discovering An Entirely New Tax

A RECENT instance of this variety of capitalizing the foibles of people has been shown in a law passed by the town council of Amsbach, Bavaria, placing a tax on all foreign words used in any sort of advertising. A special commission is to prepare a list of words to be considered "foreign," and either the words must be replaced by some good German synonyms or else the owners of "American bars," French "coiffeurs" and other such fashionable establishments must pay for them at the rate of one rentenmark for every letter in the word.

—Lorraine (Ohio) *Journal*.

RENT refers to the value of the bare land. It does not include buildings or other improvements.

—HENRY GEORGE,

## Death of Robert Schalkenbach

ROBERT SCHALKENBACH, life-long Single Taxer, died suddenly at his residence in November of this year. He was president of the Manhattan Single Tax Club in 1897 and always a generous contributor to the movement. He became a convert to our doctrine in 1884.

He was born in the old Chelsea District of Manhattan on June 15th, 1856. After an elementary education, he was obliged to become a breadwinner at the age of twelve, first working in a silk mill, then as errand boy for a jeweler and finally learned the printing trade in the establishment of Isaac J. Oliver, New York City's first steam printer. He worked his way up from the position of "printer's devil" to the foremanship. At the age of thirty, he became associated with Mr. John C. Rankin, former Mayor of Elizabeth, New Jersey, and succeeded him about twenty years ago as head of the John C. Rankin Co., printers.

He had seven brothers and sisters, but his is the first death in the family in sixty years. His widow survives him.

The funeral services to our friend were largely attended; practically the head of every great printing establishment in New York and vicinity being present. Following are the names of Single Taxers who attended: James R. Brown, John J. Murphy, F. C. Leubuscher, John H. Scully, Joseph H. Fink, A. C. Pleydell, Hon. Edward Polak, Sylvester Malone, James MacGregor and Charles H. Ingersoll.

The ceremonies concluded with the reading of the last chapter of *Progress and Poverty* by John J. Murphy. Our departed friend attended the funeral of John S. Crosby where Mr. Murphy read that chapter and expressed to his wife the wish that if he passed away before him, Mr. Murphy should perform a similar service at his funeral.

Frederick C. Leubuscher made an address which epitomizes so well the fine qualities of our departed friend that we refrain from adding to the eloquent and feeling tribute of which the following is an imperfect abstract:

### ADDRESS OF F. C. LEUBUSCHER

Five years ago I made the address at the funeral services of my brother. It was, of course, difficult to make a fluent speech. I am laboring under much the same disability this afternoon, for our friend was to me as a brother. Our friendship runs back thirty-eight years. In 1886, I met him in the famous political campaign in which Henry George ran for Mayor of this City against Abram S. Hewitt. We were both interested in the success of the "prophet of San Francisco," for we had several years before become convinced, through reading his immortal book, "*Progress and Poverty*," that "the earth belongs in usufruct to the living." In other words, we were Single Taxers. It was this philosophy that colored and guided the greater part of Robert Schalkenbach's mature life, for he was a very young man forty years ago. I seriously believe that the high-minded, generous, forbearing and patient Bob Schalkenbach that