

Lloyd George Staging Another Liberal Sham Fight on Land Question

ONCE again the Liberal Party in Britain is to embark on a Land Campaign. As in 1912, the head and centre of it all will be Mr. Lloyd George who now, as on the former occasion, is motivated by no considerations of principles, but solely by those of expediency. Ever alert to sense the trend of popular opinion, the lesson of the three years 1906-9 was not lost upon him.

At the General Election of January 1906, the Liberal Party had been returned with an unprecedented majority. That sturdy Radical, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, was Prime Minister, and his declaration, made with such obvious sincerity at the opening of the election campaign, that the business of the Liberal Party would be to "make our land less a pleasure ground for the rich—more a treasure house for the nation" flashed a message of hope into the farthest and darkest corners of the landlord-ridden countryside. For the first time in history the agricultural constituencies went Liberal. Inspired with new courage, the laborers voted contrary to their masters' wishes, and rejected the nominees of the squire and parson in favor of Liberal candidates. What that meant for the laborers only those with personal knowledge of the conditions of life in an English village can appreciate. The dismissal and persecution of laborers suspected of Liberal sympathies that followed immediately upon the defeat of the Tory and Landlord Party at the polls, gave some indication of the terrible power then—and still—wielded by the landlords and their hangers-on, the parson and lesser "gentry" in the rural districts.

Unfortunately, Campbell-Bannerman had felt obliged to include in his Cabinet some of the Whigs who were in association with Lord Rosebery in the Liberal Imperialist League—a mushroom concern that promptly expired after the appointment of its moving spirits to Cabinet rank. Asquith, Edward Grey and Haldane, in particular, took office in the new Liberal Government, and their influence resulted in the production of palliatory schemes such as Old Age Pensions, Health Insurance, etc., Three years passed without any attempt to deal with the land. Meanwhile, Campbell-Bannerman died, and was succeeded as Prime Minister by Asquith, with Lloyd George as Chancellor of the Exchequer. During these three years the by-elections were going steadily against the Government; a sure sign of loss of public confidence.

That this was due to the failure to implement Campbell-Bannerman's promise concerning the land was urged upon Party headquarters by those in touch with the people, and who knew their bitter disappointment at the betrayal of the trust reposed by them in Liberal promises of Land Reform. This pressure, combined with the need for rev-

enue to finance their pet "welfare" and "uplift" schemes, led in 1909 to the introduction by Lloyd George of his now famous Budget—the so-called Land Values Budget. The effect was electrical. The by-elections, which up to that time had gone against the Government, now went completely in its favor. Indeed, it came to be said that the Liberals could not lose a seat. After very protracted discussion the Bill passed the Commons and was sent to the Upper House. The Lords adopted the unconstitutional course of rejecting the Finance Bill, whereupon the Government went to the country, and, in January, 1910, were returned with a reduced, but still large, majority.

The Budget was re-introduced and duly passed into law as the Finance Act, (1909-10).

It is significant that at this election the Counties reverted to their old Tory allegiance. This was due to the exemption of agricultural land from the operation of the Land Value Duties of the Budget. This fatal course was adopted on the advice of Fabian Liberals sitting for agricultural constituencies, who did not—or perhaps, did—understand the purpose of the Duties. These went to Lloyd George and begged him to exempt agricultural land, saying that unless he did so they would not get back at the next election. Having no particular attachment to principle he yielded, and the hopes of the rural workers were dashed to the ground. It is satisfactory to record that the aforesaid Fabians did not go back to the House of Commons, notwithstanding the exemption for which they had pleaded. Almost to a man, these are now in the Labor Party, and this is no doubt in part the explanation of that Party's failure to face up to the landed interests which have been, as Mr. Snowden said, "so deeply entrenched for so many generations."

The Budget passed and out of the way, the remainder of the session was devoted to the Parliament Bill, a measure designed to limit the veto of the House of Lords. This was in the nature of a frontal attack upon the Land Lords' position as hereditary legislators, entirely irresponsible, and representative of nothing beyond their own privileges. Introduced by Asquith, and backed among others by Lloyd George and Haldane, it was not drastic in its terms. Instead of logically proposing to end the power of the non-elective chamber to flout the expressed wishes of the electors, it timidly and half-apologetically proposed that the right of absolute veto the Lords had come to assume they possessed should be limited to three years' delay, after which a measure should become law with or without their consent. As regards Finance, the constitutional right of the Commons to entire freedom as laid down by the Bill of Rights of 1689 was reaffirmed, and it was provided that in all cases where the Speaker of the House of Commons certifies a bill as "a money bill," the measure shall be outside the power of the Upper House to alter. In the event of their refusing to pass such a bill it is to be returned to the Commons, and, upon that as-

sembly again approving by a majority vote, to become law within one month.

Timid and hesitating as was the bill, the Lords put out all their strength in an effort to defeat it. Had it proposed the abolition of their chamber they could not have offered greater resistance. As it was, it occupied the time of the whole session, and only passed into law after a general election (December 1910), at which the Liberal Government was returned with its majority unchanged, and on a hint that a sufficient number of new peers would be created to ensure its passing. The life of subsequent Parliaments was shortened by this act, being reduced from seven years to five.

Two political issues of long standing were also much in evidence in the period under review: Irish Home Rule and Disestablishment of the Welsh Church. To these the time of the House was given over in the sessions of 1911 and 1912, to the exclusion of all consideration of economic questions. Again it was becoming evident that the country was cooling in its affection for the Liberal Government, and those in charge of the party machine were seeking a likely "cry" in readiness for the next election. In their simplicity, they supposed that the Land Question was disposed of by the Budget, and accordingly ceased to issue literature on the subject or to mention it in their speeches. So were they drifting to certain disaster at the polls when there occurred two by-elections that have since become landmarks in the history of English politics. We refer to North West Norfolk, in May, and Hanley, in July, 1912. In the former case, a rural constituency, E. G. Hemmerde, K. C., against the advice of many and in opposition to the Party caucus, jumped in, and, on a Land issue, won the seat, to the surprise of all the prophets. Similarly, in the second instance, a purely industrial area, (mining, engineering and pottery workers) R. L. Outhwaite, a stranger, in a three-cornered fight against two strong local men, headed the poll with a majority of 654 where the Chief Liberal Whip had prophesied his defeat by at least 8,000 votes. These was no denying that it was the bold presentation of the Land issue, not as mere fiscal reform but as the means of emancipation from slavery, that carried the day in each case.

Then it was that Lloyd George declared his intention to have a Land Campaign. "To stop the rot," as he said. With this object in view he went round with the hat to the wealthy baronets and the seekers after "honors" who sat on the Government side of the House, and raised over £20,000 in one week. With this fund he set up a Liberal Land Housing Council, with a Land Committee to enquire and report. Speakers were engaged, not necessarily because they understood the question, but for the reason that they had some platform ability which they were prepared to sell to the highest bidder. And so the great sham fight was staged. But the claim of the Land Lord to "own" the soil was never challenged. Speaking

at Swansea, May 1912, Lloyd George said: "The people are getting too halting in the application of their principles, and many politicians too are afraid of their principles. Gigantic problems are waiting settlement, but Parliament is afraid. All parties seem to be affected with this nervous prostration. But what about the Liberals? Look at the land question. Up to the present they had dealt with it as if they were handling a hedgehog."

This might have been supposed to indicate a coming change in the method of handling the question. But no such thing. In due course his Land Committee began to report; volume followed volume. Much information of interest to the historian was collected, but it is with the proposals that we are concerned. All were based on the recognition of the ownership of land as "property." Thus the fundamental injustice was ignored, and the usual talk of "fair rent courts," "fixity of tenure," "improved housing conditions," etc., etc., followed. As a sop to the Land Taxers, the Taxation of Land Values was mentioned; as was Rating for local purposes. Mr. Lloyd George went on tour, speaking at great demonstrations of the Party at Bedford, Swindon, Middlesborough, Holloway (London), Newcastle, and Glasgow. The Land Question was not mentioned by him at any of these gatherings, with the exception of that at Glasgow. Carefully and deliberately he avoided all reference to Land Values, in spite of his promises to put this in the front of his programme. The Radicals then in the party soon grew impatient of this foolery, and a storm arose that led to the Glasgow fixture being put off until after a deputation had extracted a pledge from Lloyd George that he would there deal with the proposals for taxing Land Values. The meeting was held, and the demeanor of the speaker was interesting to watch. Facing a huge audience he began on the note: Rich Dukes and oppressed tenants, etc., offering rent courts and the other palliatory suggestions of his bureaucratic Committee, but without drawing a cheer. He was obviously discomfited at the failure to excite his hearers and hurriedly turning over a sheaf of notes, commenced to speak of taxing land values. He was more than surprised by the storm of cheering that immediately broke out, and, encouraged thereby, let himself go. At the close of the meeting he was heard to remark to those near him on the platform. "This meeting has taught me far more than I could teach it." Now for the sequel.

Immediately following each previous demonstration, an official verbatim report of his speech was issued by the Liberal Publication Department, as a pamphlet, and circulated widely for the information of the general public, and as a guide to the party speakers as to what they were to say. Not so, however, the Glasgow speech. Again and again the writer made application to the Department for it, only to be told that it was not going to be published. Being at that time a member of the Executive of the Liberal Federation, he pressed for an explanation

and was told there was "no demand." Assured that if a demand arose the speech would be issued, he set out to create one. This was soon done, and after a delay of over three months the speech was published. This incident throws a flood of light on the inside workings of the Party, and of the lack of sincerity prevailing in official circles. The Liberals were afraid of their principles.

Not long after this the country awakened suddenly to find that it had been tricked into the crime of the great war. Social questions were put out of the way; but now, after ten years of suffering, as a result of which the people are reduced to a condition of misery such as obtained at the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars a century ago, the politicians are once more addressing themselves to these matters. Thus it is we are to have a "Land Campaign." Readers of LAND AND FREEDOM who have followed us thus far will be able to estimate the sort of "handling" Lloyd George will meet out to the "hedgehog" now. History will repeat itself. Indeed, it has already done so. Lloyd George, who is the real leader of the Liberals, has set up another Committee to enquire and we have before us its first "report." It is entitled "Coal and Power," and deals with the question of the future of the mining industry, and the supply of electrical energy. Once again great meetings are to be addressed, and the "little Welsh Wizard" is to expound his latest plans for vote-catching, in competition with the rest of the Socialists. Once again a sham fight is being staged, and the new generation that has arisen since the last great farce was enacted, and is presumed to know not the prophet, is to be induced to vote Liberal in the belief that reliance may be placed upon promises made by the present leaders of that once great Party.

Let us in the light of the foregoing, now look at the precious "report." In the matter of "Royalties" on coal, we read (pp. 6-7) "The average royalty for the kingdom is 6.9d. a ton. There are many small royalty owners, but very large amounts go to a few. One owner receives £423,000 a year, and four over a £100,000 each***the royalty-owner renders practically no service in return to the industry. Indeed, too often, in addition to drawing royalties he charges high prices for the land required for cottages and recreation grounds, or he exacts exorbitant terms for water or way-leaves."

At his first meeting (Chesterfield, July 19) Mr. Lloyd George likened the capitalist, the miner, and the royalty receiver to a team of horses, and proceeded as follows: "Of the three horses, the royalty receiver is of no use to the industry. He contributes nothing. He impedes. He does not draw; he simply drags. He does not pull his weight, but is himself a weight to pull. He is putting no capital into the development and the working of the enterprise. We agree with the miners that this obstructive steed should be cut adrift and turned out to grass. We have come to the conclusion that it is essential to

the efficient working of the industry that the capitalist who contributes nothing, and the exercise of whose powers simply hinders and hampers and confuses—that is the private owner of the minerals—should be eliminated from the concern. There are 4000 of them. The mine owners take heavy risks. But the owner of the minerals risks nothing. He only stands to gain, and for the £6,000,000 a year which he draws from the industry what does he put in?"

Turning again to the report we find it stated that "Our first and most fundamental recommendation is that all minerals and mineral rights should be acquired by the State. The royalty-owner is, in fact, the only participator in the wealth produced by the mining industry who does not himself necessarily contribute anything to the creation of this wealth, and who can therefore be eliminated without any injury to the efficiency of the industry." (p. 47). We shall presently come to the proposed manner of the "elimination" of the useless "private owner of the minerals." The Committee have classified the minerals into three categories. First, those now being worked. Secondly, those which are known or presumed to exist, and whose presence adds to the selling value of the land under which they lie. Thirdly, those which are as yet unsuspected, or which are believed to lie too deep to be practically workable, and which, therefore, add nothing to the present value of the land. In respect of the first, these are to be purchased, and we are told that the "total value is pretty well known; it would amount to approximately £70,000,000."

There is no confiscation. "We propose to pay a fair price to the existing owners; we are utterly opposed to the proposal which has been made of confiscating legal rights of mineral owners." Thus the report.

So the industry is to be saddled, apparently for all time, since the report while prescribing payment of the £70,000,000 "in bonds" is silent as to whether these are to be terminable or permanent. One thing is certain, "the interest would be chargeable on the revenue to be derived from future royalties." The useless steed is to be turned out to grass on the revenue to be derived from future royalties—which does not look to us like affording much relief to the industry. The royalty-receiver of today is to become the interest-receiver of to-morrow and all will be well, perhaps. There is to be a little matter of a ten per cent. deduction from the capital value of the bonds to form a "welfare fund" "to raise the standard of life in the mining districts." This we, presume, will not be "confiscation." Anyway, it is clear—except, perhaps, to the Committee—that the two industrious steeds will have to produce the wealth represented by that ten per cent.

"The second class of minerals," continues the report, "must be treated differently. They cannot all be acquired at once, because this would involve the creation of so large

a capital debt that the income from the national mining estate would be unduly burdened, and excessive royalties would have to be charged on the mines actually worked in order to pay interest on the assessed value of minerals which were not yet being worked." Five years are to be allowed for owners in this category "to make by way of anticipation a claim for compensation, to become effective in the event of the minerals being taken over." Failure to lodge a claim within the period is to lose the right. An interesting feature here is the acceptance of the "owner's valuation." "All such claimants should be required to assess the value of their own minerals."

"The third category of minerals—those whose existence is unsuspected—is on a different footing. All such minerals are to be deemed to be the State's as from the passing of the Act, without compensation." This has the true ring; and we should like to move the reference back of the report, with instructions to the Committee to show cause why the just and simple method they here propose should not be applied all round. We think they would find it difficult to reconcile the proposals to purchase the coal with the statement they make on page 8, where we read that "*Providence has placed coal* in some of the most beautiful parts of Britain." Surely the compensation is due to "Providence" and not to the few who are confiscating the coal today?

What exactly the Committee had in mind when penning the following we are quite at a loss to imagine. "Without capital there would be neither mines, *coal*, nor employment." Is Providence a capitalist?

The Liberal record in regard to the Land Question is one long story of broken pledges. The present move is but one more attempt on the part of a particularly "slick" politician to fool enough of the people to secure his own ends. We do not think he will succeed, but it is pathetic to see how readily some sincere Henry George men, simply because he uses certain phrases but which are meaningless on his lips, rush in to be fooled some more. The old proverb which runs "Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird" would appear to be open to exceptions.

J. W. GRAHAM PEACE.

"THERE should be no slums, vice, crime, or poverty," exclaimed Rev. Hough Houston, of the M. E. Church at Hampshire and Superior roads, Cleveland Heights, a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. He added; "The cry of the weary world is not for charity, but for a chance." Now, what do you suppose he means?

REV. FRANK H. NELSON, assistant rector of Christ Church Cincinnati, Ohio, calls organized charity work "a form of practical Christianity." He is mistaken: it is a form of conventional christianity. Its devotees use it to keep the destitute quiet and to shut off inquiry into the big cause of poverty.

BOOK NOTICE

WHAT LA FOLLETTE'S STATE IS DOING

This is the title of a book by our old friend, Chester C. Platt. It appears on the eve of a campaign in which La Follette has at last thrown his hat in the ring, as he has threatened to do for a long time, so long indeed that people had begun to regard it as a mere bluff.

Some of the material in this book has already been covered by Frederick C. Howe, in his "Wisconsin, an Experiment in Democracy." Mr. Platt's book reviews the reforms adopted in Wisconsin, part-time schools, a university supported almost wholly by state funds raised by taxation and popularly controlled, farmer-labor representation on all educational boards, limitation of hours of labor for women to fifty hours a week, increases in workmen's compensation, legislative power of recall, a fifty per cent. exemption on homestead improvements, and many other legislative enactments, some of questionable value, some to be recommended under present conditions, and all labelled "progressive."

It would be hard to discover anything very fundamental in the long list of "achievements." Some of them have had their uses under a topsy-turvy economic system. Nearly all are purely socialistic, and nearly all are of the pale pink brand of socialism. One thing, however, is to be said. In Wisconsin more than in any other state public attention is directed to human and civic betterment. There does exist a passion for improvement in social conditions that is very wide-spread and constitutes a really hopeful sign. We need not despair of it. The cooperative movement, for example, has made great strides in the state.

Mr. Platt reminds us that the Republican party with its mission to abolish slavery was born in Wisconsin. That state was the first also to adopt woman suffrage.

There is an interesting sketch of Dr. Charles McCarthy, founder of the Legislative Reference Library, and author of "The Wisconsin Idea," who died in 1921.

Names familiar to Single Taxers occur in the work and among them are John Harrington and Edward Nordman. There are sketches of many prominent in Wisconsin politics, John J. Blaine, George F. Cummings, Zona Gale and many others.

Under the heading, Taxing Unearned Incomes, Mr. Platt devotes a chapter to economic rent and the desirability of looking to it as a source of revenue. And Mr. Nordman is quoted at length on this phase of the subject.

The author confesses that little real progress has been made in public ownership, that being considered as desirable in itself. And it is instructive to note that Wisconsin has not yet succeeded in establishing Initiative and Referendum, though other states, which your Wisconsin man would regard as backward, have had the I and R for many years. Mr. Platt thinks this slow progress of "reform" is due to the absence of leaders in the past, and regards Mr. Geo. F. Cummings as the man of the hour.

One thing Wisconsin may pride itself upon with reason. That is its university. Few institutions of learning in the country can boast of anything like the same academic freedom that characterizes its directors and its faculty. This is not a small thing. It is worth all the palliative legislative measures, which are reviewed and which no one better than Mr. Platt knows how to estimate at their true value.

The work is published by the *Batavia Times Press*, at Batavia, N. Y. and the price is \$2.

J. D. M.

CORRESPONDENCE

THINKS THE PARTY NAME TOO LONG.

EDITOR LAND AND FREEDOM:

I think it most unfortunate that our friends have chosen such a long name for the new party. "Commonwealth," which is the economic