

LABOUR PARTY AND RATING

The Agenda for the Annual Conference of the Labour Party at Brighton, 30th September to 4th October, contains notice of the following resolutions:—

(a) This Conference is of the opinion that after the passing of the General Enabling Act, referred to on page 7 of the Policy Report on Land and National Planning of Agriculture, the principle of the Rating of Land Values should immediately be applied in urban areas; and that in view of the importance of this question suitable prominence could only be given to it by the issue of a Party Policy Report on the subject of Urban Land. STREATHAM D.L.P.

(b) This Conference instructs the National Executive Committee to include in the Labour Party Policy the rating of all empty property on the basis of 25 per cent of the rates chargeable on such property, and that further, Local Authorities shall assess for rating purposes all unused or undeveloped lands and that 25 per cent of such rates chargeable shall be levied against such unused or undeveloped lands, the assessing of such lands to have regard to the "site value" thereof. MANCHESTER B.L.P.

These resolutions call for remark. The one from Manchester is so faultily worded that the operation of the rate levy proposed on vacant land is not clear. What may be said is that the framers see it would be an anomaly to charge rates on vacant houses while allowing valuable vacant land to remain exempted. And it is a good sign that the Manchester Labour people are turning their attention to the question of land values, even tentatively, because they have lately been so wedded to the policy of a local income tax.

As for the Streatham motion, it reads that nothing is to be done about land value rating until the Act has been passed for buying out the owners of agricultural land. Before such a Bill could be carried, with all its embodiments in the way of organizing and controlling agriculture under boards and committees, the cost of the land acquisition being burdened upon taxpayers generally, Parliament might spend many sessions. Then, and only in urban areas, land value rating is to be adopted or rather, legislation for the purpose is to be introduced. The framers of these policies can be left with their problems: how to draw the line between agricultural land and urban land and why land value right of the line should be gifted to the owner, while left of the line it should be taxed out of his hands and into the public exchequer.

"In view of the importance of this question," it is well said that, "suitable prominence could only be given to it by the issue of a Party Policy Report on the subject of Urban Land." Contribution to such statement of policy, officially endorsed, is already available in the Party's *Notes for Speakers* which the United Committee have reprinted as a pamphlet with the title *The Challenge of the Rates*. It seems that opportunity should be taken to have this pamphlet in the hands of all the delegates at the Conference.

Other resolutions, from Cathcart and Kingston-on-Thames bearing upon land value taxation, have not been placed on the agenda, apparently in view of the standing order that "when the Annual Party Conference has by resolution made a declaration of a general policy or principle no resolution or motion concerning such policy or principle shall appear on the Agenda for a period of three years from the time such declaration was made. . . ." The principle of land value taxation was endorsed at the Hastings Conference, 1933.

DENBIGHSHIRE SLUMS: AND THE CAUSE THEREOF

By A. Williams Price

The recent inquiry in Wrexham relating to the housing conditions (slums), in Broughton, Gwersyllt, Rhos, Ponciau, Cefn Mawr, Cefn Bychan, etc., may well give rise to the following questions:—

1. Why were houses built in such utterly undesirable sites; on steep hill-sides, on water-logged soil, etc., when admirable sites existed within easy distance?

2. Why were houses crammed and jammed together while acres upon acres were, and are, lying idle or producing little?

3. Were the builders crazy, or were they possessed by devils vile as the legion responsible for the untimely end of the Gadarene swine?

In 1688, when James II had to fly for his life from Britain, and the Dutchman, William III, was proclaimed king by the vested interests of that day, nine-tenths of Denbighshire was Crown property, held by farmers and peasants, etc., who had fair security of tenure so long as the Crown Tax or rent was paid; hence it is certain that the change in Landholding, and the production of Slums, occurred after that date.

Crown lands were used by William as bribes, to buy the support of patriots who were open to support the side (any side) offering the greatest bribes; his first great gift of Crown lands (in Denbighshire) caused an uproar among the hungry patriots, he was accused of undue favouritism, etc., but gradually the land of the people was filched: one parcel, of nearly 5,000 acres, was sold to a local magnate for the sum of £208. The small farmers and peasants became landless men, seeking work, wage labour.

With the Industrial Revolution (1750 to 1850), land containing coal, iron, clay, etc., became very valuable and was "enclosed": this served two purposes, it provided wealth for the person "enclosing" the land, and it also supplied abundant cheap labour to face the horrors of early mines and factories. There are two ways, two methods of converting a man into a slave: (a) by fastening chains on his limbs (chains are expensive, and they also hamper his work), the other method (b) is to enclose the land; this is effective and cheap. The workers had to live near their work, houses were built on the scraps and odd bits of land that were not "enclosed," thus the Denbighshire Slums originated.

Bad as conditions may be now, reference to the Government Report, "State of Education in Wales, 1847," reveals something worse, and it must be borne in mind that the evils were deliberately brought about, not by Huns, Germans, or any other dwellers in foreign lands, but by our native rulers. The builders of the houses were compelled by economic taskmasters, just as the Israelites were compelled to produce bricks without straw. They (the builders) were not crazy, and if any of the parties concerned in the production of the Denbighshire Slums were possessed by evil spirits it does not appear to have been the builders!

The only constitutional way to abolish the twin evils of Slums and Unemployment is to Tax and Rate Land Values.

To Teachers of our Economic Classes "WHAT'S WRONG WITH TAXATION?" is recommended as a sessional text-book. Paper covers. Price 1s. post free. Special terms: 9s. per dozen, post free.