

Dr. Jones concludes: "If the Liberal Party wish to gain the confidence of the nation on agricultural reform, there is only one path to be followed, the reform of our rating system. When that reform is completed, the other questions of co-operation, credits and many other matters will be modified and simplified."

"LET US HAVE NO FALSE REMEDIES"

Mr. Fred Skirrow's letter to the Press

In the Budget of 1909-10, Mr. Lloyd George, as Chancellor of the Exchequer—secured the valuation of the land, the first step towards the application of that policy. During the course of that campaign Mr. George roused the people to heights of enthusiasm and he said: "Do not let us have false remedies, we want to do something to bring the land within the grasp of the people. . . . I am looking to the spring-time when the thaw will set in, and when the people and the children of the people shall enter into their inheritance that was given them from on high." And Mr. George declared in those days that "the future of Liberalism depends upon the courage and firmness with which the party faces the task of realizing that hope."

To justify this new change we are told that things have altered since those days. Very fortunately for humanity, economic laws are more firmly established than the opinions and convictions of some of those occupying and seeking to occupy high offices of State. There is little in his new scheme to recommend it to any class of people who have to depend on their industry for a living. Either the old scheme or this one must be a "false remedy." Both may be wrong, but both cannot possibly be right.

In eloquent speeches in the old days public values were to be taxed for the public good. This would have forced land into the market and given labour and capital the opportunities for engaging in production and thus solving the unemployment problem; in other words, whoever made improvements on or in the land was to be given the right to them. But this is now repudiated in the new policy and has nothing in it to commend it to those who seek personal liberty, general prosperity and industrial peace.

Farmers are not to be relieved of the burden of maintaining main roads, education, police and asylums. Neither are they to be given the boon of untaxed improvements nor any relief from the many other grievous taxes that fall upon them in unseen and unrecognized ways. And as if the above were not enough there is the proposal under the new "remedy" that tenant farmers who are judged—by a committee of farmers—to be farming inefficiently will be cleared out of their holdings after "fair warning."

Is not such a scheme flagrantly unjust and undemocratic? Who is competent to draw the line of demarcation between efficiency and inefficiency? Who cannot foresee the dissatisfaction and strife that will arise as soon as such arbitrary committees begin to discriminate between farmer and farmer? And what will happen to the men who for their supposed inefficiency are turned out of their holdings? Are they to be made to work for farmers deemed to be efficient, or kept at the public expense, or what?

And, does not the State control of land mean the State control of those who use it? When Government officials have the leasing and letting of land the way will be opened for no end of favouritism and corruption. Will this tend to solve our economic problems and lessen the revolutionary spirit?

Further, the scheme can hardly fail to result in great inequalities of treatment even between landlord and landlord. Rack-renting landlords will secure the highest annuities as compensation, and the generous, fair-minded landlord will be penalized for his sympathetic treatment of his tenants. These are some of the objectionable features of the new "remedy" and there are many others.

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(Mr. Skirrow's letter as printed above appeared during October in the LONDON TIMES, the MORNING POST, the HULL TIMES, the HULL EVENING NEWS, the YORKSHIRE OBSERVER, the SHEFFIELD INDEPENDENT, the YORKSHIRE HERALD, the YORKSHIRE EVENING NEWS, the YORKSHIRE EVENING POST, the NEWCASTLE JOURNAL, the LIVERPOOL COURIER, the NELSON LEADER and other papers.)

MONOPOLY PRICES FOR LAND

From Mr. Lloyd George's Speech at Manchester, 24th October

(We deal with the speech in our leading article.)

They made an arterial road round Leeds and this has been the effect. The land opened up increased in value from prices ranging from 3d. to 6d. per yard to prices ranging from 4s. 6d. to 5s. per yard. The value of the land was increased ten-fold.

Lord Montagu of Beaulieu takes a great interest in the making of new roads. Talking about the land through which the new arterial roads pass, he says the values have gone up from £30 and £35 per acre to £200 and £300 per acre.

There is a road made from London to Tilbury under the 1921 provision. The other day somebody said: "I am going to put up a little property I have there for auction." He was receiving (in rent) £80 12s. gross for 39 acres with four cottages and a bungalow. This land, which was £80 12s. gross, fetched £6,600.

We gave a guarantee of £6,500,000 for the construction of a tube beyond Golders Green. It went right into the heart of the country. If before the construction of that tube you had tried to sell the land, you would only get agricultural value for it. Now it is fetching hundreds and hundreds of pounds per acre.

A new arterial road was made recently called Kingsway, in a suburb of Manchester. The land abutting on the road has gone up from agricultural value to the price of £900 per acre.

The Glasgow Council arranged to buy 49½ acres of land at Govanhill as a housing site. The cost of the site was £42,500. The land hitherto was rated at an annual valuation of £81.

The Cleansing Committee of the same Council acquired five acres at Craigton. The price demanded and paid was £850 per acre. The rateable value of those acres, including a small farmhouse was £25 and for the land itself, the rateable value was about 10s. per acre.

In Stoke-on-Trent the Education Authority is buying 16 acres of land for £6,000. It is at present rated at £4 15s. and a house on it at £21.

Manchester paid £300 per acre for 54 acres of land to include in their town-planning scheme. The Corporation laid out an open space with a road three-quarters of a mile in length. Then they wanted to acquire land on the other side of the road and from the same owner. He asked a very much higher price on the ground that the land was worth much more because of the park on the other side of the road.