

THE POSSIBILITIES OF REVOLUTION

By Fred. Skirrow.

We reproduce with pleasure the following comment and criticism appearing in the YORKSHIRE OBSERVER, 22nd July:—

"Mr. Seebohm Rowntree has done well to warn us against the too common tendency to sneer at the idea of there ever being a possibility of a revolution in this country. The daily Press indicates the fact that the revolutionary spirit is abroad and daily growing in volume and strength. As Froude said: 'It is easy to persuade the masses that the good things of this world are unjustly distributed—especially when it happens to be the exact truth.'

"In Mr. Rowntree's opinion, the revolutionary spirit is due to the failure of the capitalists to consider the 'needs' of the workers. In my opinion he is wrong. If all employers were to act on the same principles that Messrs. Rowntree and other good firms act, the cause of the evil would still exist and continue to bear its natural fruits.

"At bottom the question is not one of the 'needs' of the workers. It is a question of the 'rights' of all the people. Mr. Rowntree's article gives one the impression that he regards capitalists as a class apart; who have in some way been specially endowed with a superabundance of wealth, in order that they may act as almoners for the Master; that they are not to use their wealth selfishly, but generously—as well for the benefit of their employees as for themselves. I see no warrant for such an assumption. As Thomas Paine said: 'It is wrong to say that God made rich and poor. He made male and female, and gave them the earth for an inheritance.'

"Land monopoly and the taxation of industry lie at the root of our social evils. What can a capitalist do without land? Can he give a job to the unemployed? Is it not a fact that, as land is the source of all wealth and the field of all employment, landowners are the real masters of the situation, and ultimately determine the terms on which capitalists and their employees shall engage in production? Mr. Rowntree, I believe, owns both land and capital, and he is a close student of political economy, so he will know that the above statement is quite correct.

"No doubt Mr. Rowntree will have learnt from his own experience that land values tend to rise all the time, and that it often happens that land lies idle, while capital and labour are unemployed, because those who would use it can see no prospect of an adequate return on the terms the owner seeks to impose.

"In PRINCIPLES OF POLITICAL ECONOMY, Book V., chapter 2, John Stuart Mill, writing on the rise of land values, said: 'The ordinary progress of a society which increases in wealth is at all times tending to augment the incomes of landlords; to give them both a greater proportion of the wealth of the community independent of any trouble or outlay incurred by themselves. They grow richer in their sleep without working, risking or economizing.' And Mill puts this pertinent question, which I would put to Mr. Rowntree and those who share his views: 'What claim have they, on the general principles of social justice, to this accession of riches?' And, if it be true, as Mill says, that the landlords as such are getting an ever-increasing proportion of the national wealth, does it not follow that capitalists and labourers are having to go with an ever-decreasing proportion? Can the capitalists as employers of labour pay in wages what the land monopolists have appropriated in rent?

"The men who made the laws of Britain in the past were keen students of political economy. They knew

that the real masters of a country were those who could control the land. Was it not a Cecil, Secretary of State under Elizabeth, who declared that 'The wealth of the meaner sort is the summit of their rebellion, the occasion of their insolence, of their contempt of the nobility.' And did he not suggest that 'It must be cured by providing as it were of some sewers or channels to draw or suck from them their money by subtle and indirect means to be handled insensibly.'

"The 'subtle' means adopted by these gentry for training the wages of labour and the earnings of real capital were indirect taxes, in lieu of the land tax. To-day we can scarcely make a purchase of any kind without paying taxes, and the Government is determined to add to them a number of other taxes of an even more pernicious character than those now levied. This policy of 'Protection' will increase poverty and add to the discontent already so apparent.

"William Pitt knew what he was talking about when he said, 'there is a method by which we can tax the last rag from the back and the last bite from the mouth.'

"Taxing land values will give us equal rights to the use of land and it will secure to the public a revenue, the value of which the people create. Land monopoly and taxation of industry is the cause of unemployment, bad trade, low wages and poverty. It is poverty in the midst of great wealth that is causing the revolutionary spirit. Let the Government add 'protective' taxes to those vicious taxes now levied on industry, and it will add to the poverty of the masses and strengthen the appeal of the revolutionists.

"Chattel slavery and unjust taxation have ever been the main causes of revolutions in the past. By freeing trade from existing burdens, by carrying free trade to its logical conclusion, we can best usher in a period of general prosperity and industrial peace. Then will the appeal of revolutionists fall on deaf ears, and the nation rest secure."

A REAL ESTATE HANDBOOK

There is evidently no difficulty in valuing land in the United States, as the undernoted review of this HANDBOOK, appearing in the ESTATES GAZETTE, London, 18th July, indicates. The practice has all the appearance of an exact science. The story should help readers of the GAZETTE, *pace* the Land Union, to get familiar with the essential first step to the Taxation of Land Values:—

"Mr. George A. Hurd, who is President of the Mortgage Bond Company, of New York, deals with land values: 'The highest values in every community,' he says, 'are those of land devoted to retail business use. Twenty or thirty years ago the general law governing the highest values was that these values were treated by the population at the rate of 20 dollars a front foot for each 1,000 of inhabitants. This law applied to communities of all sizes, except the largest cities, where after reaching 500,000 population values were no longer created at so high a rate. For example, in Washington, D.C., twenty years ago, when the population was slightly over 250,000, the highest value in the city was 5,000 dollars a front foot. In Memphis, Tenn., when the city had a population of 100,000, the highest value was 2,000 dollars a front foot, while in Duluth, Minn., with a population of 50,000, the highest value was 1,000 dollars a front foot. In the country there has been a gradual tendency toward a greater increase in value per inhabitant, and it is probable that in the present time about 35 dollars a front foot for 1,000 inhabitants would be an average figure for all cities, except the largest. Where the growth of a city is abnormally rapid, a continued growth is usually anticipated and discounted, and the tendency for business and consequently land values to follow any development of residential areas which takes the best customers to some other part of a city.'"