

GOVERNMENT POLICY AND THE LAND

Mr. Snowden's Protest

Speaking in the House of Commons on 4th February on the Labour Party's Amendment to the Address in reply to the King's Speech, Mr. Philip Snowden, Ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer, said:—

We have the land, which is the original source of wealth which is absolutely essential to the community and given by God for the use of His children, and we have divided the land amongst a few people, with the result that a vast number of people have no right to live upon the soil upon which they were born unless they can get a landlord who will give them permission. Therefore, we start from the fundamental right of all the people to use the land and to own it.

During the last century millions of people have been driven from the land on which they were born, and they have been driven to the towns and have aggravated greatly our industrial difficulties.

No less than 300,000 men during the last 20 years have been driven from the land. We are importing yearly £400,000,000 worth of foodstuffs from abroad in a year, all of which, with the exception of wheat, might be produced on the soil of our own country.

We imported £100,000,000 worth of meat from abroad last year, and nearly the same amount of cheese, butter and bacon, all of which might, by the scientific development of the resources of our own country have been produced in this country, and this would have found work for a vast body of men and women in a useful and healthy occupation. There is nothing at all in these proposals of the Government which is going to place one additional man upon the land, or produce an additional pound of food. There are to be credits, but there are more direct subsidies proposed in this White Paper of the Government. Drainage is to be carried out at the expense of the State—the draining of the landlord's private land. The landlord has no capital; he cannot afford to do it; but State money is to be spent on draining the land, and making worthless land worth £1, £2 or £3 an acre, or, if it is to be used for small-holdings, £10. It is said that there is to be no subsidy, but for years the agricultural interest has been living on State subsidies. It is almost free from rates; the farmer has never paid his share of Income Tax; and last year, under the concession made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the estates of rich landlords do not pay the same estate duty as property which takes a different form.

There is another aspect of this question which is equally important, and in some respects of even greater importance, and that is the urban aspect. I have little sympathy with people who complain about heavy local rates and oppose the most practical way of relieving local rates. The value of the landlord's property is increased by public expenditure; while he sleeps he grows fat. As I have stated before in this House, urban land values were never increasing more rapidly than they are to-day, in view of the extension of motor transport. Therefore, we believe in the full ownership of the land by the people, and we would take immediate steps to appropriate for local and national purposes every penny of the value of the land which is created by the energy, enterprise and capital expenditure of the community.

There is, in the Speech from the Throne, a prayer for co-operation and harmony in industry. We are all for co-operation and harmony. No class in the community suffers as severely as the working people do from industrial chaos and lack of co-operation. But there must

be conditions of harmony and conditions of co-operation. You can have no real co-partnership in industry so long as one class controls the means of production and wealth and another class is nothing more than a hand, and is far too often regarded as a cog in the industrial machine.

THE POWER TO PRODUCE

Speaking in the same Debate, Mr. George Lansbury said:—

We are faced with an economic situation where mankind are able to control the elements in the air and on the sea. Man speaks from one end of the world to the other. It is done in a most mysterious fashion, but it is done none the less. We fly in the air; we go under the sea; we burrow in the bowels of the earth, and mankind can produce out of the earth more than ever was produced before. A few men working in combination can wrest from the soil much more than they need for their own consumption. In every direction production is a thousand-fold, if not a million-fold more than it was in days not long ago, and yet we are asked to believe that the people of this land, who do the work of this land, must live and die as mere serfs without any chance of real life at all.

THE LANDLORDS' RAMP

(From LANSBURY'S LABOUR WEEKLY, 6th February)

The landowners of Great Britain know that sooner or later an assault will be made upon their monopoly. This fact overshadows every other consideration of the present Government. They know, and the landowners know, that public control of coal and other minerals in the land must be established before we can solve the mining difficulty. Faced with an unvarying army of unemployed workers in the nation, involving as this does heavy national taxation, and burdens on local authorities which are driving many of them on to the high road of bankruptcy, the Tory landowners know that the only outlet for unemployed workers is the development of the land of this country. They are more conscious of the crippling power of their monopoly than are the workers themselves, but economic necessity will drive the politicians to face the problem: "How are we to become the possessors of the soil of this nation?"

The present Government have devised a scheme of land purchase. In 1917 the Corn Production Act was invented, giving guaranteed prices to the farmers; immediately land values rose, then the landowners forced the farmers to buy out their holdings. When this Act was withdrawn in 1923, land values fell and the State had to come to the aid of the farmers with the Agricultural Credits Act to pay off the bankers' demands, while the landlords had walked off with the swag. The Government now propose extending the facilities of the Act to assist small-holders to buy land. This will lead to competition for land and high land prices. Last year the Government spent £24,000,000 on schemes, all of which will now enter into the value of the land, which will accrue to the benefit of the landowners, through State purchase.

We are indebted to Mr. H. Reid, of South Shields, for a copy of his statement making an eloquent "Plea for the Rating of Site Values," which he caused to be printed and circulated for the consideration of Representatives attending the Conference on Unemployment and Rating held at the Town Hall, Newcastle-on-Tyne, on Friday, 29th January. We are certain that Mr. Reid's timely service bore good fruit in the ground he cultivated so well.