

resolution, which was discussed in Committee, expressing their opinion, to be sent to the Ministry of Health, that the land should bear some contribution towards the local rates. One could not expect a Council to be so inconsistent as to recommend something they did not believe in. The promotion of the present Bill gave them a chance to put their opinions into practice. The principle had been advocated on many platforms. It was rather old, but had never been applied, in spite of what the National Citizens' Union said in their letter. Councillor Chatfield went on to urge that where the value of land appreciated through building and other developments, and through the enterprise and industry of the people, the ground landlords should be called upon to contribute something to the rates in return for the enhanced value of the land. They gambled in towns as people gambled in stocks and shares. If a landowner was told that he would be called upon to pay a tax of 2½ per cent on land at the Crumbles worth £500 per acre, he would probably not admit that such was the value of the land to him, but would say it was practically worthless. Yet the land could be held against appreciation, and when the Corporation wanted land on the Crumbles on which to build houses they were asked to pay £500 an acre. He did not see how business men could look upon his proposal except with favour since they knew what it was to be penalized by having their assessments increased when they developed their business. If his proposal were carried and put into force the whole of the borough would be contributing to the local rates, instead of only the portion that happened to be built on. Imagine what the three chief landlords were drawing from the whole of the town; but, although

the ratepayers had appreciated the land, the ground landlords were paying nothing thereon towards the rates of the town.

Councillor Marshall (Labour) who seconded, said ground was being held up, even the Crumbles, which had been given up by the sea and divided amongst the three chief ground landlords. Nature had provided that land, but if the people wanted any of it they had to pay through the nose. All the roads round about that land were kept up by the people, yet if the Corporation eventually had to build there they would have to pay dearly for the land.

Councillor Lower said if the motion had been to put a tax of 2½ per cent on unoccupied land he would have supported it, because he belonged to a small section of the community who for years had striven for that end, feeling that there were glaring cases in Eastbourne where land was being held up because the price offered was not quite what the owner thought it was worth. He could not go so far as the motion asked him to. [Manifestly Councillor Chatfield's resolution called for a tax of 2½ per cent on the market value of *all* land, including unoccupied land. As to improved land, the new rate could be substituted for rates now falling on buildings and improvements.—EDITOR, *Land & Liberty*.]

After further debate the motion, which was supported also by Councillor Higgs (Labour), was defeated.

This discussion in the Council has been all to the good. It provoked an informing and well-sustained correspondence in the *Eastbourne Gazette*, specially notable for Sir Edgar Harper's able contribution replying to the contentions of the National Citizens' Union.

AN OFFICIAL REPORT ON WEST AFRICA

Review by Rev. Mervyn Stewart, F.R.G.S.

Mr. Ormsby-Gore is a specially valuable witness and his report* is full of really good evidence for us. Chapter VI. on the Palm Oil Industry says—"It has always been an essential factor in Nigerian policy to allow the native communities the full and free use of their land, to which they are passionately attached, and any attempt to alter this system fundamentally will cause the greatest unrest through the country. The problem is how to preserve what is good in the system while bringing the methods . . . more up-to-date" (p. 103). On p. 105 there is a most useful remark that as elsewhere cultivation is much more productive where the fullest interest of the cultivator is allowed than on land communally owned and managed, when it is "no individual's interest to look after the trees." Liberal and Labour armchair-farmers will come down over this hard fact sooner or later! In this connection the plans of the Niger Company directors, such as Mr. L. Moseley in the *Times*, 2nd October, 1926, are given the most absolute rejection. "The British Government have again and again laid down that under no circumstances will they undertake to provide compulsory labour for private profit in any British Dependency" (p. 107). "Lord Leverhulme, in demanding nothing less than a freehold title to land, was asking for something which even the Government rarely possess in Nigeria. . . . Where conceptions of freehold in tropical Africa have crept in, as in Uganda and the Gold Coast Colony, it is due to English law and alien

ideas—and where it has been so introduced it cannot be said to have been very successful. . . . The grant of leases is not only possible but unobjectionable provided that the rent of such land is paid to the native community or the individual whose rights are affected . . ." (p. 108).

The vital importance of paying the land rent as a token of loyalty is badly but unmistakably described on pp. 116/17: "To withhold dues or tax was looked upon as an act of rebellion"—as in 1642 when English tenants "struck." There is unfortunately the dreadful record of litigation in Southern Nigeria (p. 117) and the Gold Coast (p. 147) where whole communities are ruined by legal disputes over boundary lines of land never surveyed, which has changed hands often for centuries, is not taxed, and is now increasing in value as if in Florida. 50,000 cases in 1924 in the Owerri Provinces alone are mentioned, mostly about land. In Northern Nigeria where the public right to land value is fairly well protected, this intolerable waste does not take place ("Remarkably Free," p. 118). No one will litigate to pay a fair rent, and few ever need fight over ownership of houses or other improvements.

On p. 130 there is sound criticism of the limitation of building lease periods in Northern Nigeria to 60 years; and a most unfortunate (if true) plea for the septennial re-assessment for site value rents "that it is very seldom that rents are raised on a revaluation." Why not? If land value has gone up? For example, the railway to Kano was expected to run two goods trains per week: it now has eight full goods trains per day (p. 24). Surely this means more public outlays and more public income

*"A Visit to West Africa, 1926" (Hon. W. G. A. Ormsby-Gore, M.P., Under-Secretary for the Colonies). Cmd. 2744. 3s. 6d. net.

from sites where this trade can be handled? There may be an example of an unexplored economic law that where natural opportunities are in effect open to all by confiscation of the economic rent as it arises, the whole benefit of social progress goes to the individual producer and no part or very little to the community before population-increase forces production to less desirable sites. More information on Nigerian revaluations would be most useful.

It is noted that the "wage-earning class" is very small, nearly the whole population being "in fact peasant proprietors," and those who work for wages are generally paid above the legal minimum, while those who work in the theoretically bad conditions, under "truck" system, etc., return voluntarily each season from their homes as they have long done (p. 132). Compulsory labour on public works is usual in absence of men looking for employment.

In the Gold Coast Territory "an important feature in organization is the position of certain hereditary priests called Tindanas who are the representatives of the Earth God, and act roughly as Trustees for tribal lands which are owned communally by the tribe" (p. 138). The deplorable activities trained in England are censured as insidious and quite lawless in their corrupting work of ruin: "I was informed that a very large proportion of land theoretically (*sic*) still held under native customary laws is being dealt with by methods approximating to English law." He shows that the ancestral lands of the Gold Coast native are being grabbed by lawyers to pay the costs of endless and objectless boundary disputes. This curse of "litigation" only arises because the communal value—the shadow treasure as Germans say—is not taken by and for the needs of the community as it arises. He proves this once again in the converse (p. 118)—the absence of the curse of litigation is noted in the "near-Henry George" area of Northern Nigeria.

He finally admits that only such laws can save the collapsing and perishing social structure of the Gold Coast peoples, yet doubts if the evil has not now gone too far for remedy. Little England speaking!

Probably indeed the exact ordinances of Moslem Nigeria will not apply in areas boasting centuries of English education and influence: but the ideal is the same. A cadastral valuation-survey with no great or wasteful accuracy in the jungle: a small and rapidly increasing tax on site value of privately owned lands: remission of taxes as this revenue accrues, with special lower rates for holders of tribally owned lands: devolution of at least half the revenue to the local municipal or tribal authorities with responsibility for appropriate services in return (as advised very wisely on p. 131). These steps would soon wipe out any corrupt legal expropriation of the natives, and if there be any real advantage in the English freehold (subject to a 20s. single tax on land values exempting all improvement and production)—well, enough has been alienated to give the systems a fair trial in open competition and with no obstacle for the worse tenure to become the better.

NATURAL LAW IN SOCIAL LIFE

By W. R. Lester, M.A.

Special reprint in pamphlet form of the author's address at the Copenhagen Conference

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GLEANINGS FROM THE LIBERAL LAND POLICY

The following items recognize the strength of the sentiment in the country for the Taxation and Rating of Land Values:—

In an informing article on "Our Tangled Transport" in the *Land News* (November), the monthly organ of the Land and Nation League (London), Mr. Comyns Carr, K.C., gives the Rating of Land Values a first place in his proposed remedies. He stresses the point that "wherever a new line of railway or tramway has been opened, a great rise in local land values can be directly traced to it. . . . If these land values (or even part of them) had been taken to pay for the railways and tramways, we could all have free travel to-day."

The ground landlords who have contributed nothing to the rates of London have drawn immense sums out of the wealth which the capital and labour of other men—nay, their mere presence—has contributed to this piece of England. . . . "A perfumed seigneur lounging delicately in the *Cœil de Bouf* hath an alchemy whereby he will extract from her the third nettle and call it rent" was Carlyle's comment on the poor Parisian widow gathering nettles for her children's dinner. We gather what we can on these acres, and our landlords take their toll. We hope the Urban Land Conference will direct London's struggle against this tax.—*The Star* (London), 22nd November.

What is the universal stumbling block now to all extension of work by our municipal bodies? The answer is the burden of rates. And we cannot, as things are now, think of acquiring land, or acquiring power over land, except in terms of heavy expenditure by the ratepayers, most of it going into the pockets of persons who have in no way earned the money.

Our Liberal policy sees this clearly enough: that nothing can be done until funds can be made available for doing it. What then do we propose?

- (1) That we should put a rate on the land in proportion to its best use for the community.
- (2) That we should be entitled to buy the land at the valuation put upon it for rating purposes.
- (3) That wherever public improvements have increased the value of land we should be entitled to put a rate upon the increased value so given to it.

That, then, is the way to get the money.—Sir Francis Acland, *Daily News*, 23rd November.

No. 2 is not the way to get the money; it's the way to collect it for some landlords, or land speculators. Land Value Taxation will reduce the price or value of land; buying land will have the opposite effect. No. 1 will enable the community to get all the land it requires on fair economic terms. It will do likewise for individual enterprise. What more does a Liberal Land Policy require. Why should No. 2 be introduced to question the efficacy of No. 1, as a means to provide the money and make land available.—ED., *Land & Liberty*.

The Star, 26th November, hits the nail on the head nicely, in the following comment:—

Lord Montagu of Beaulieu—not noted as a supporter of the Liberal land programme—has shown that land through which new roads have been cut has enhanced in value to the extent of £900 an acre, of which the community gets nothing. If only one item in the Liberal programme were adopted—that of site values—it would give us at least some of the money needed to