

PUTTING IT IN THE FOREFRONT OF POLITICS

Mr R. R. STOKES, M.P., ON THE LABOUR PARTY'S OPPORTUNITY

IN A contributed article to *Labour*, the official monthly organ of the Labour Party, Mr R. R. Stokes has six pages devoted to the Taxation and Rating of Land Values. He makes the remark, justifiably: "I wonder if the great influence which the practical presentation of the Henry George philosophy had on the victory at Ipswich has been sufficiently recognized in the Party—so great an influence had it that I believe we should meet with much greater success at the polls were more reference made to its concrete application in election addresses and from public platforms." Elsewhere we report that at the November Municipal Elections the Labour Party, in a nation-wide campaign, have urged the Rating of Land Values as one of the main planks of its policy. The following are extracts from Mr Stokes' article, explaining the question also in its wider relationships.

We must decide whether or not we are prepared to face the alterations in Society necessary to bring about the change to plenty for all in place of starvation, insecurity and grinding labour for the masses whilst a few people get away with too much. . . . It is important that the advance should be along the right avenue using the right means so that the effect may not be vain and so that all fair-minded people may be attracted to join in the effort.

Whilst the propertied members of the community may not easily accept this verdict, very few of them, if any, will deny that political evils the world over have become so terrible that many of us can hardly read the daily papers with their account of cruelty, barbarity, suspicion and war preparations which fear of existing conditions engender. It is as well to remember that this fear in the ordinary man's breast is played upon by the privileged classes who would far sooner, subconsciously, perhaps, face war than that their privileges should be taken away. . . .

The peace and unity of peoples can only be obtained by way of economic security, which in turn means equating the wants of the masses with the natural resources available so that all may have wealth if they choose to make the effort to get it. We are constantly stating that the land must be restored to the people for this very purpose and though the Taxation and Rating of Land Values is in the official (Labour) party programme it does not seem to be fully realized, that it is the best, fairest and quickest means of achieving this object. . . . Possibly it would be better understood if it were referred to as the return of the infringed rights of the people to the use of land by making the owners pay to the community a rent according to its worth. At present quite fantastically the people pay rent to the owners for permission to work, a rent which should properly be paid to the State, and which constantly rises as improvements are made, most of them paid for by public money. . . .

The capital value of land in Great Britain without any improvements—the site value—is reputed to be no less a sum than £10,000,000,000; this should yield not less than £500,000,000 every year to its owners provided the land is put to its proper use. A gigantic figure equal to more than half of the National Budget even in these days of high expenditure! No one can deny that this value is communally created—the owner gives land no value from his mere ownership—so what is more fair than that the income derived from it should be made available for communal needs? This site

value will constantly increase as the population increases and the demands of the community grow. The owners may claim that they do not in fact collect this vast annual sum to which my reply would be: "If you don't, then it means you are not putting your land to its proper use and the extent to which you are not so doing is a fair indication of the hardship you are inflicting on the community in the form of enforced idleness with its attendant poverty. We all know that all wealth comes from land, and if you selfishly refuse the community access to it, hardship and want must result. . . .

We are at present in the midst of the biggest armament race ever known; land is wanted for aerodromes; you can't land aeroplanes in the middle of towns—you need wide open spaces. What has happened? The Government have acquired large areas all over the countryside, many of them comprising land which had been allowed to run to waste and all of it agricultural land and so derated; yet when the community needs it for National Defence it immediately becomes valuable and the owners get a fat price. . . .

What is the change to be? Simply this—that . . . those who own land shall be asked to make a contribution to the State for that privilege and that that payment shall be in the form of a rate or tax upon the value of the land they hold.

Could there be a simpler solution? Why, then, has it made so little headway and apparently been disregarded by reformers of every school? The explanation I think is simple. Reformers representing the workers have been too busy with what they consider "immediate" reforms and the workers themselves far too much occupied in the struggle for existence to think about first principles. The privileged classes on the other hand know only too well wherein lies their power of extracting service from the weary toil of the workers and encourage them to go for any reform or palliative other than the one which alone can bring them relief. To be poor is no crime but to allow a system to continue which forces poverty on the mass of the people when we perfectly well know that a change would bring plenty to everyone is a crime which will bring its own punishment—a punishment which we now see lurking on the horizon in the form of world war. . . .

What are we going to do about it? When considering change remember that "unless its foundation be laid on justice the social structure cannot stand." Seeing as we do the wreckage of human misery all round us we must surely ask: "What moral law has been defied and what natural rights of man have been ignored that this appalling condition should persist?"

The first thing we must do is to rid ourselves of two fundamental fallacies; that there must be physical poverty and that war is inevitable. Recognize that true Christian charity means arranging society in such a way that everyone shall live with their essential physical needs secured to them provided they will work, and that the giving of half-crowns to beggars and hundreds of thousands to universities may be generosity but is not Christian charity. Secondly, we must rid ourselves of the idea that hard, unremitting, grinding toil is an end in itself; we should so arrange things that we work to live, not live to work. . . .

Open up land to labour so that all may work and have enough and to spare, so that all men may in their

own working lifetime lay aside sufficient to provide for their old age and leisure hours necessary to them during their march through life. . . . Imagine a world where there were more jobs than workers instead of workers than jobs! Where men could sell their efforts to the highest bidder instead of being forced to accept the ridiculous pittance they do at present and with no security at that! Have you ever thought who creates demand? Why, surely the workers themselves in order to satisfy their wants. Yet under our present system millions are kept in enforced idleness and poverty is rampant. . . . When idleness is no more, poverty will be no more; and when poverty and grinding want are missing from the world's surface what material need will there be left to fight about? Then shall we have peace on earth.

FORESTRY

A survey of the condition of forestry in this country is made by Mr L. F. Easterbrook in an article in the *New Statesman and Nation* (22nd October). The total area of woodlands is somewhat less than 3 million acres. Of this 330,000 are in the hands of the Forestry Commission and managed upon scientific principles. The other nine-tenths are in private hands, and the estates where forestry is really practised "can be counted on one hand."

The area of woodlands is only 4.3 per cent of the total area. In Denmark and Holland it is double as much. In Belgium and Italy over 18 per cent, and in Germany nearly 24 per cent. It is stated by Sir Roy Robinson, the Chairman of the Forestry Commission, that in addition to making proper use of such land as carries woods, another 2 to 3 million acres could be devoted to this purpose without taking away any land from more profitable uses.

Mr Easterbrook answers the excuse that the neglect of this industry by owners of land is caused by the death duties. "The Exchequer is particularly generous to woodland owners in this respect. When an owner dies, death duty is not chargeable on the timber and its value is not brought into the aggregate of the estate" so as to increase the rate of duty on the remainder. The owner can deduct the costs of realization and replanting in computing his liability to income tax if he manages his woodlands on a commercial basis. While as far as concerns death duties proper forestry management "is the best form of insurance against death duties, the only form of insurance in which duty need not be paid on the money saved."

Mr Easterbrook indicates that in his opinion the position is not to be improved by State assistance. "Nor can one evade the fact that a large part of any benefits coming to agriculture by the effort of the State or the cultivators themselves must eventually disappear in higher rents—not because landlords are necessarily grasping, but because land is a limited article and prospective cultivators would pay more to obtain it. Quite recently agricultural land was sold in Kent, including some hop fields. The hop fields carried the right to grow hops, which has become a remunerative business because the producers organized themselves. Whereas the value of the ordinary farm land in this district was about £35 per acre, the right of hop-growing made the hop fields worth about £250 per acre at this sale."

In all these transactions the public interest is quite overlooked. Consumers are burdened with higher prices and tax payers with higher taxes without realizing that they are subsidizing privileged interests.

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We are glad to announce the publication of this new book and to express gratitude for the commendations it has received in the Forewords by the Rt Hon C. R. Attlee, M.P., the Leader of the Labour Party, and the Rt Hon Sir Archibald Sinclair, Bart., M.P., the Leader of the Liberal Party. Sir John J. Withers, M.P., Conservative Member for Cambridge University, also commends the book. An Introduction has been written by Mr R. R. Stokes, M.P., to whom we are indebted for his initiative in having suggested such a work and for the practical interest he has taken in its production.

In their Forewords, Mr C. R. Attlee and Sir Archibald Sinclair write:

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I trust that it may have the wide circulation it deserves.

ARCHIBALD SINCLAIR.

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