

# The Public

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A Weekly Narrative of History in the Making

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## EDITORIAL

### The British Budget and the Land Question.

The better the British budget (pp. 457, 462, 487) gets to be understood, the clearer does its beneficent character come out. It is indeed what Henry George looked for hopefully and predicted confidently, the first great legislative step in England toward the socialization of social values and the consequent emancipation of labor. No doctrinaires of any economic school, not even of the best, could have formulated the issue so perfectly for immediate political victory and subsequent radical progress.

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What the Bannerman ministry tried for—and all that it tried for as the first move in this connection—a measure for the appraisal of the capital value of land throughout Great Britain, has been demanded through this budget in a way that hardly admits of a negative response. The House of Lords thwarted the Bannerman ministry. But the Asquith ministry, profoundly loyal to the principles which Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman bequeathed it, now challenges the Lords with a baffling alternative. They must either burden hopelessly the class-conscious political party that champions their privileges, or grant through the Lloyd-George budget the very land valuations which they defiantly amended out of the Campbell-Bannerman valuations bill (vol. xi, p. 38). This is the most important phase of the present land value agitation in England. If the budget

had proposed nothing more, it would have proposed enough for all the immediate practical purposes of progressive legislation.

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There is therefore no reason for disappointment at the low, and in some respects discriminating, taxes which the budget imposes upon land values. While they do not bear every test of sound economic doctrines, they do bear the supreme test of practical politics for the realization of such doctrines. In the right economic direction, they are along the line of least political resistance.

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To secure through the budget the primary desideratum, a thorough valuation of the capitalized land values of the kingdom, it was necessary to impose some land value taxes; to minimize resistance, it was important to make those taxes light, and to let them fall where they would excite the least effective opposition. This has been done with the skill of high statesmanship and the fidelity of the best social leadership. Upon the adoption of the Lloyd-George budget the legislative roots of land value socialization will have been planted, and in the very nature of things it will thenceforth grow. Hardly an exaggeration is the cable comment of T. P. O'Connor, in which he says that this is a budget that no one could have dreamed of as possible until "some avowed supporter of the Henry George single tax idea held the position of chancellor."

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#### **The Political Significance of the British Budget.**

Six months ago public opinion in Great Britain anticipated an early fall of the Asquith ministry and the return to power of the party of reaction and privilege. Nor did this feeling slacken until Lloyd-George flung into the political arena what the London Nation truly describes as the first democratic budget of English history. Until the privileged interests of Great Britain were confronted with that rarely bold and original political challenge, the progressives were discouraged and the reactionaries confident and eager.

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The privileged classes had begun again to feel secure, and demands for further privilege in the name of "protection to British industry" grew clamorous. Free trade, as well as free land and free men, was to be a sacrifice upon the altar of class privilege. And with it all, to charm the plundered multitude and thereby make privilege all the more secure, alarms of war were sounded,

mellowed with promises of "bread and circuses" from the wages of building preparatory Dreadnoughts. The Conservative party, with its Chamberlainistic infusions, was looking confidently for a reactionary revolution in England, which should abolish free trade, establish old privileges more firmly, introduce new ones, and check the advance of the democratic movement in politics. All this has undergone a staggering change as the full meaning of the Lloyd-George budget has worked its way into the public mind.

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There is now a piteous tone to the comments of the Conservative press of Great Britain, so recently exultant; and the speeches of the more intelligent Conservative leaders are like the hysterical cries of children lost in a wood. They appear dazed by the reaction which the Lloyd-George budget has produced. Their policy of protection, which seemed so near, has faded away. The policy of free trade, which seemed to totter, is erect and stalwart. The privileges of landlordism, which seemed to have gained new life, are once more tremulous with infirmity. The eager confidence of the Conservative party has given way to unconcealed and unconcealable demoralization. Not only is the Lloyd-George budget the most democratic in English history. It is also the most tremendous political maneuver of modern times in any country.

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By conceding the demand for Dreadnoughts, but charging the expense to the privileged interests that demanded them, the Lloyd-George budget has silenced the alarms of war. By pointing to the necessity for old age pensions and their good effect, and indicating the further necessity for opening opportunities of normal and useful employment for the unemployed, at the same time providing for the expense by a trifling exaction from unearned wealth, this budget has politically gagged the privileged in the very utterance of their protest. They may curse among themselves, but they cannot hope for sympathy from the masses. By specifying land values caused by the community as a whole and not by landlords individually, as a just source of public revenues, this budget turns protectionism backwards, and guarantees free trade against the only danger that has threatened it—apparent needs for further revenues from indirect taxation. By making light the immediate taxes upon land values, and so distributing them that they will fall upon the over-rich, this budget has forced the great landlords into a

position where they will either have to submit to "the thin end of the wedge" of land value socialization, or make themselves sordidly ridiculous by exposure to public opinion as selfishly seeking to perpetuate complete exemption from taxation upon their socially produced property. By providing for national valuations of the lands of the whole kingdom, with a heavy tax upon future increases in value caused by social growth, this budget has firmly laid the foundation for a social superstructure in Great Britain that may make that country truly free—the world's model of democracy.

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Exemption from taxes on industry, land values socialized for public uses, free trade with all the world both within and without the Empire, and the exploitation of labor abolished—these are among the reasonable possibilities to come from the adoption of the Lloyd-George budget.

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It is because they are reasonable possibilities that the privileged interests will consolidate to break the budget down. For the same reason the British democracy ought to unite to secure its adoption. The London Nation, a rationally socialistic paper, struck the true note for all schools and shades and parties and factions of progressives in Great Britain when in its issue of May 1 it said of the budget scheme that—

the Chancellor of the Exchequer may fairly call on every democratic force in the nation for sustained and undivided support. He will have united the "interests" against him by a comprehensive and fearless attack. He must unite the enthusiasms and principles behind him. Whatever there is of democratic ardor among our people, whatever feeling there be for national improvement, if there be any compunction for the lot of the poor, and any joy in the building up of a strong, vigorous, and united nation—all such forces, laying aside mutual controversy and nice preferences of detail, must rally in their supreme effort to enforce the will of democracy or write themselves down forever barren of good.

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### Producer and Consumer.

From the tariff debates in the Senate, it would appear that the only human interests are those of the producer. We hear of foreign producers "invading" the market of American producers, as if this market were a pasture field without a fence. But the American market consists of American consumers, and its "invasion" means that foreign producers supply them with some things in exchange for other things, on better terms than American producers do. This is an "invasion"

that looks good to the American consumer. If it didn't, the foreigner couldn't "invade." But the interests of the American consumer are not recognized in the American Senate. He is regarded there as the natural prey of American producers. Consequently a tax is to be put upon his purchases from foreign producers so that he will be glad enough to purchase from American producers at exorbitant prices. And who are these American consumers? Why, except as they steal (either vulgarly or according to law), or beg (either in rags from want or in velvet with greed), they are also producers. In the very nature of the case, then, you cannot protect them as producers without robbing them as consumers.

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### Workingmen and Employers.

It is unfortunate that the existing employers' organizations are so deeply impregnated with the spirit of monopoly and so completely given over to class bitterness, as to make friendly intercourse between them and labor organizations impossible.

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The interests of unprivileged employers and the interests of hired workingmen are really identical. They are identical not only with reference to the narrow relation of employer and employe, but with reference also to the wider and more general relation of buyer and seller. It is only the beneficiaries of special privileges that are essentially inimical to either. Yet beneficiaries of special privileges, masquerading as legitimate business men, and often in some degree really legitimate business men, dominate the existing employers' organizations, and while playing their own predatory game with their innocent associates, fan the flame of class hatreds by constantly emphasizing instances of exasperating methods of labor organizations.

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Labor organizations do resort to bad methods—"damnable methods," as the National Association of Manufacturers, assembled on the 17th in New York, expressed it in the words of one of their members and with cheers from the rest. But so do employers' organizations resort to "damnable methods." The National Association of Manufacturers itself is no exception. Human nature explains it all. And those "damnable methods" are not to be improved by the irreconcilables and impossibilists of either set of organizations. It is indeed to be said for labor organizations that they are on the whole better disposed than the employers' organizations under present control.