

THE SINGLE TAX.

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"OUR POLICY."

"We would simply take for the community what belongs to the community—the value that attaches to land by the growth of the community; leave sacred to the individual all that belongs to the individual."—Henry George.

LAND MONOPOLY AND NATIONAL EFFICIENCY.

A FRESH incident has occurred in the protracted struggle between Lord Penrhyn and the Bethesda quarrymen. Lord Penrhyn recently appealed to the Guardians' Assessment Committee for a reduction in the valuation of his quarries for poor rate, on the ground that the valuation had decreased from £22,000 to £8,000. He succeeded in this appeal, and he is now trying to get a similar reduction in his assessment for the county rate. The Carnarvonshire County Council held a special meeting last month to consider the matter, and it was unanimously resolved to oppose Lord Penrhyn's appeal at Quarter Sessions. It was stated that when the present assessment was made the Penrhyn quarry output was 96,000 tons per annum. The present output is only 36,000 tons.

Whether or not Lord Penrhyn is entitled to the reduction under the law of rating now in force we do not know, and while the matter is before the Courts perhaps no opinion on that point should be expressed. But *if* Lord Penrhyn is entitled to be let off paying poor rate and county rate because he will not allow his quarries to be worked it would be a striking instance of the injustice of our present rating system.

The immediate consequence would be that the burden of making up the deficiency would be thrown on all the other ratepayers in the district. It is reported, and we can well believe it, that if Lord Penrhyn's appeal succeeds there will be wholesale appeals by other ratepayers affected. There is indeed something peculiarly unfair in a grant-in-aid being made to Lord Penrhyn at the expense of the rest of the population so as to strengthen him in the war he is waging against them.

But the most serious aspect of the matter is seen when it is looked at from a general point of view and not merely as an incident in the present struggle. The really serious thing is that those who control the national resources and means of livelihood should be encouraged to withhold them from use. It is now generally recognised that one of the chief causes of overcrowding and high rents is the immunity from rates granted in respect of building land which is not put to use, and that the sound policy would be to rate land everywhere on its true unimproved or site value whether or not it happened to be fully utilised at the moment. The result would be that much more land would be utilised. The same reasoning applies to mines and quarries, which are of course "land" in the scientific sense just as much as building sites are. If mineral and stone-bearing land were rated everywhere on its true unimproved value whether or not it was actually being worked at the moment, then much of it that is now held idle would become available. There would be more regular employment and better wages for those engaged in mining industry, and the increase of output would mean cheaper prices and more business in all trades dependent on mining products. It will not be Lord Penrhyn's fault if workmen fail to see the effect which the Taxation of Land Values would have on the condition of labour.

We have heard a great deal lately about the need of increasing "the national efficiency." This phrase blazed out in the bewildering display of rhetorical fireworks with which Lord Rosebery recently dazzled our political eyesight. Mr. Asquith in January wrote of "the later developments of Liberalism in the direction of education, temperance, better dwellings, an improved social and industrial environment; everything, in short, that tends to national, communal, and personal efficiency." But from these apostles of efficiency we hear no straightforward pronouncement for a general measure of Taxation of Land Values, the political reform which of all others would liberate the fettered energies of the country and arouse its dormant capacities; which would secure full opportunities to labour and capital, and a fair return for work and expenditure, and establish on a basis of freedom and justice the only kind of national efficiency which deserves the name. The toiling masses who have neither the time nor the training to think out economic problems are gradually by force of

circumstances groping towards this truth. Meanwhile the educated exponents of Liberalism, the professed champions of freedom and progress, are blind because they will not see, and devote their talents to throwing the people off the scent.

An independent witness has lately given an unprejudiced view of the present situation. A writer in the *Fortnightly Review* for April, who signs himself "A Student of Public Affairs," and states that he belongs to no political party, discusses the position of the Liberal Party and says:—

"The policy that would command the loyal adhesion of the democracy of the whole of the United Kingdom is a drastic and far-reaching reform of the Land Laws. This would not only attract the support of the democracy of Ireland, England, Scotland, and Wales; it would be welcomed also by a not inconsiderable section of the urban aristocracy. Such a policy is, of course, impossible to Lord Rosebery, and would, in any case, be scouted by the "Official Liberal Party."

Speaking of Liberal Imperialism, he says:—

"In home affairs the real heart purpose of its whole policy is to burk, and shirk, and obviate all suggested reforms that have any worth or reality in them.

"The theory which finds favour with the new aristocracy, and with their political representatives, the Liberal Imperialists, is that the toilers who make up the urban democracy should be fed and washed and carefully housed in order that they may do more and better work. The practice of this theory keeps tram-horses and dray-horses in good condition; and on the assumption that the wage-earning toilers are beasts of burden it is a very excellent theory. And that is the tacit assumption which gives rise to the carefully-concealed root idea of the social-reform policy of the Liberal Imperialists. To social reform that will make urban democracy more independent, more self-reliant, more free, your Liberal Imperialist is not friendly—is not even indifferent;—he is actively, bitterly, and determinedly, though not overtly, opposed.

"Take one question as an example: the housing of the poorer section of urban populations. It is peculiarly an urban problem, and is not, as some dull persons imagine, confined to London. It is as serious, though not to the same extent, in ever considerable provincial town. The cause of overcrowding, and the remedy for it, are plain to every reflecting and candid mind of average intelligence. Land monopolists have laid their acquisitive hands on all the suitable building land in the vicinity of every town of any importance. To the city dwellers it is forbidden ground on any terms save those which the owner chooses to dictate. But the population increases and must overflow—must, therefore, acquiesce in the demands of the landholder. The fly which strays into the web of the spider may curse its own folly; the population which overflows on to the land of the monopolist has no choice. This is the system which makes the slums; this is the system which keeps up the slum rents. Break down the system, and the results of the system will disappear.

But the slum owners and other owners of house property in the great towns are urban aristocrats, and neither political party in the State will touch their vested interests except to enhance the value of them. From the Conservative Party no one expects a reform of this kind; from the Liberal Party they do expect it, and they are always disappointed. Their disappointment has found expression in the long reign of the Conservative Party.

"Until a party capable of opposing them arises the Conservatives will bear sway in the State. Such a party has yet to be created. An immense province lies open inviting its reforming zeal. **Such a party has but to appear and give pledges of a sincere determination to carry through a drastic and really effective reform of the Land Laws of the United Kingdom, and not merely of Ireland, in order to find itself the victorious leader of an overwhelming majority of the electorate, alike rural and urban, of the whole of Great Britain and Ireland.** Will such a party arise? I can only answer that I have no hope that it will. An election campaign costs money, and I am unable to discover in what manner such a party could find money for such a campaign."

The last sentence shows the assumed cynicism of an arm-chair observer whose heart and head are right, but who has little experience of the people, and does not know the response which seldom fails to come when an appeal is made to the better side of mankind, their sense of justice and desire for progress and better conditions of life for their fellow-men. It is to such instincts that we appeal, confident that, when they are aroused, the genuine party of reform will arise and gather strength to overthrow monopoly and privilege, and to ensure equally to all the fullest opportunities to live and prosper. Then we shall be able to speak about "national efficiency."

THE progress of civilisation requires that more and more intelligence be devoted to social affairs, and this not the intelligence of the few, but that of the many. We cannot safely leave politics to politicians, or political economy to college professors. The people themselves must think, because the people alone can act.—*Henry George*, "Social Problems."

I AM not denouncing the rich, nor seeking, by speaking of these things, to excite envy and hatred; but if we would get a clear understanding of social problems, we must recognise the fact that it is due to monopolies which we permit and create, to advantages which we give one man over another, to methods of extortion sanctioned by law and by public opinion, that some men are enabled to get so enormously rich, while others remain so miserably poor. If we look round us and note the elements of monopoly, extortion, and spoliation which go to the building-up of all, or nearly all, fortunes, we see on the one hand how disingenuous are those who preach to us that there is nothing wrong in social relations, and that the inequalities of the distribution of wealth spring from the inequalities of human nature; and on the other hand we see how wild are those who talk as though capital were a public enemy, and propose plans for arbitrarily restricting the acquisition of wealth. Capital is a good; the capitalist is a helper, if he is not also a monopolist.—*Henry George*.