

"THE GRIT THAT CLOGS THE WHEEL"

By Col. Josiah C. Wedgwood, D.S.O., M.P.

In an informing one-page contribution to JOHN BULL, 11th July, Mr. Wedgwood writes:—

"All sensible people want the same simple thing. We want to increase production. I have never yet discovered the excuse which justifies the refusal to allow men to produce goods. Yet we hand over that power to refuse to a parcel of gentlemen, and go and sit down and speculate on how men who are not allowed to work can be found work.

"Owning land means owning the legal right to stop men working. If you want to produce anything you must first go and bribe the landlord to let you start. Of course, being human, he charges what he can get—15s. an acre for the big farmer who takes large quantities, £2 an acre for the small holder, and 1s. a rod, or £8 an acre, for the little allotment man.

"If a builder comes along he will take from him a good round lump sum of £200 an acre, or 1s. a yard, or he may lease it at £10 an acre. In any case, you pay your footing, or you remain unemployed, producing nothing.

"We must reduce this power to stop men working, or we cannot reduce the unemployed. If men are to get work they must get land. The easier it is to get land, the easier it will be to get work and produce the goods. . . .

"Land, and capital to equip, those are the prime needs, and both must be made easy to get—that is, cheap. I know of no means for getting capital cheap except by co-operation, pooling the security and borrowing in bulk. The State cannot supply cheap capital without burdening the taxpayer.

"But the State can help to get land cheap, by making it difficult for the owner to keep his land idle, by levying rates on the value of land (apart from improvements), *whether the land is used or not*. Some will say, by taking it from the landowner, even if this involves compensation at the expense of the taxpayers, that if the State could get it at a reasonable price even compensation might be tolerated in such an emergency.

"Let us see how it works out at present. The Edinburgh Town Council proposed in November, 1921, to spend £60,000 'in relief of unemployment.' The money was to be spent on the Craigentenny estate, noted for its crops of green fodder. The land had been for many years irrigated by open sewage.

"It was proposed to make an underground sewer in place of the open canals, but the town council could not start operations without first coming to terms with the landowners, to whom they had to give £5,000 'for compensation for loss of irrigation and of their rights to the foreshore.'

"Many councillors protested. If there was a nuisance they could have it removed at the expense of the landowners. They did not believe in the corporation being mulcted to pay for improvements for the proprietors, and then £5,000 more. Treasurer Deas was quite frank. The greatest advantage of the scheme would be to the land of Craigentenny. The proprietors would have seventy to eighty acres of land made available for building purposes which could not be used in the present circumstances.

"Another councillor said that until they altered the law of the land the proprietors stood to gain whenever the town made an improvement. They were taking away the irrigation altogether, which was equal in value annually to £8 an acre, to which Treasurer Deas replied that the annual value returned in the valuation roll was £4 an acre!

"Compensation at farcical prices makes any attempt to get more production from the land impossible. What, then, are we to do if we are statesmen and not puppies? Face up to it, and change the law of the land. . . .

"The land is there. Within the area of towns and large cities of over 100,000 inhabitants, taken at random, with a total population of 1,801,700 and a total area of 102,350 acres there are no fewer than 51,065 acres of land rated as 'agricultural' which at present pay on the average only 4s. per acre in rates. Here is enough land to find a plot for every head of a family in these towns.

"Such a plot would be occupied and used quickly enough, given the overthrow of the cruel monopoly that holds this territory at ransom prices. This the taxation of land values would effect. There are at present 1,200,000 allotment holdings in this country. Double that, and you have at least found some work for the unemployed that is worth doing. . . .

"For every one of such schemes the first necessity is thought, and the next and last is land."

ABILITY TO PAY, OR BENEFITS RECEIVED

What is the great error, the stupendous blunder of our tax system?

It is in assuming that the value of private improvements measures the value of public services and benefits.

Now, taxation is payment to the city on the part of the citizen for the services and benefits of the city and State.

Taxation is not a collection, and the theory of "ability to pay" is the thought of an ignorant or defective mind. Let any man who harbours that idea run his business on that plan, and he will soon be locked up in an asylum. Fancy for a moment a department store charging customers according to their ability to pay instead of the market value of the goods.

As taxation is payment for social or public services, such as streets, sewers, police, fire department, sanitation, schools, etc., it follows naturally that payment should be based on the value of those services; but in the magnificence of our stupidity we have based the charge for what the city does on the value of what the citizen has done for himself; or in other words, on the value of private improvements instead of upon the value of public services and benefits.

The annual rental value of land is the only true measure of the annual value of the services and benefits rendered by the city to the citizen, and it is the only value created by the community, and therefore is the only value that should be collected by the community.—*James R. Brown in the BUFFALO TRUTH, 18th June.*

The "Five Alls."

1. A King in his regalia—I govern all.
2. A Bishop in his pontificate—I pray for all.
3. A Lawyer in his gown—I plead for all.
4. A Soldier in regimentals—I fight for all.
5. A Labourer with his tools—I pay for all.

—*George Watson, 98, Gnoll Park Road, Neath, South Wales, in THE SPECTATOR, 4th July.*

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Primrose League Habitations are bent on summer schools. The Duke of Sutherland (Chancellor) says: "They are necessary to counter the active Socialist propaganda which is going on on similar lines." Let them all come; but it will take more than partizan nerves to get the better of the "Socialist" propaganda that stimulates or terrifies the die-hards of 64, Victoria Street, London, S.W.