

THE WAR AND "OUR LAND"

By James Dundas White, M.P.

The war makes the land question more urgent. It drives us back on fundamentals. It urges us to develop the natural resources of the country.

PRESSING PROBLEMS

We are engaged in a life-and-death struggle for the fundamental rights of humanity, for which, as the Prime Minister has said, no price can be too great. And we should be prepared for the after-effects of the expenditure. For years to come we shall be weighed down by the payment of interest and repayment of capital on our heavy borrowings. The dearth of money will check the expansion of our industries long after the war is over. Many of our best overseas customers will be as impoverished as ourselves. And many of the people here, who are now getting temporary employment in the war, and in work connected with it will, after the war, have to re-enter a restricted labour market. Even in war we should prepare for peace, and anticipate the economic difficulties which will revive with increased intensity later on.

"OUR LAND"

We are fighting for "our land." But "our land" is the patrimony of the few rather than the heritage of the people, and its rent or land-value, instead of being the backbone of public revenue, goes almost entirely into private pockets. We ought to call on those who hold "our land" to make a special contribution to the needs of the nation, in proportion to the selling values of the lands which they hold, whether they use them or not. This tax would not burden any industry or hamper any enterprise. It would only secure to the people some share of what is theirs by right.

ECONOMIC REFORM

Besides getting revenue from the true source, it would lay the axe to the root of great abuses. It would impel those who are holding up land around some towns for higher prices than they can get now, to bring these lands into the market on fair terms, and would thus give the congested centres a chance to expand. It would put a stop to the dog-in-the-manger land policy which is the curse of many country districts. It would increase the available amount of land, reduce rents to their natural level, and give better opportunities for building, agriculture, and all our industries. It would also be the first step towards the substitution of the taxation and rating of land-values for all the present taxes and rates on landed property, which would have the incidental effect of untaxing and unrating improvements. The Chancellor of the Exchequer should extend the Finance Act valuations so as to obtain valuations suitable for this tax, and should propose a national tax of 1d. in the pound on capital land-values throughout the United Kingdom.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

"Our land" can furnish us with the means of defending it. Its rent or land-value should be the main source of the "silver bullets." The expansion of the towns and the opening of the country districts would brighten the prospects and increase the vigour of the people. The growing of more foodstuffs at home would lessen the risk of being starved out by any interruption of the overseas trade. The danger of that will probably be greater in years to come, owing to the steady development of the submarine and the aeroplane, both of which will be able to prey upon merchant ships with less risk to themselves than any surface-going vessel would incur. Alike from the financial, the economic and the military standpoints, it has become more important than ever to open "our land" to the people and to remove the hindrances which obstruct its development. And the first step is to require those who hold "our land" to contribute to the needs of the nation in

proportion to the selling values of the lands which they hold, whether they use them or not.—(Reprinted from the *DAILY NEWS*, August 31st, 1915.)

A LABOUR MAN'S TRIBUTE TO HENRY GEORGE

Mr. Arthur Humphries, of the Independent Labour Party, entertained a large audience at the Ickenham Congregational Hall on April 1st with a rousing lecture on "The Land and the People."

In his introductory remarks, the lecturer said in his famous book, *PROGRESS AND POVERTY*, Henry George set out to examine the amazing and disappointing fact that progress had not brought comfort to the people, and had not improved the race so far as its material conditions were concerned. England was then witnessing an enormous increase in the power of wealth production. Labour-saving inventions of all kinds were coming into use. Surely those labour-saving inventions should have lightened the toil and improved the condition of the labourer. But Henry George was faced with the bewildering fact that all these advantages had left the problem of poverty just where it was; they made the rich richer, and left the poor unbenefited; they simply widened the gulf between Dives and Lazarus and made the struggle for existence more intense.

Henry George's thorough investigation of the problem led him to the conclusion that the widespread social evils which everywhere oppressed men amid advancing civilization sprang from a great primary wrong—the appropriation, as the exclusive property of a few men, of the land on which and from which all must live. From this fundamental injustice flowed all the injustices which distorted and endangered modern development, which condemned the producer of wealth to poverty and pampered the non-worker in luxury, and planted the tenement house behind the palace. Poverty, according to Henry George, was the open-mouthed relentless hell which yawned beneath civilised society. It was the antithesis of liberty. Liberty only came to mankind in broken gleams and partial light because of the land monopoly. Therefore in the name of justice and liberty Henry George submitted to the world as the true remedy the common ownership and control of the land.

"For the gospel in which he believed," concluded the lecturer, "Henry George worked with extraordinary zeal, and for that gospel he suffered abuse and hardship. But like other pioneers who loved justice and laboured for liberty and died before the dawn, he did not live in vain. He left behind powers that will work for him. Already he has great allies, and thousands of energetic brains and patriotic souls are pledged to the reforms which he spent his life in propagating. He dedicated *PROGRESS AND POVERTY* 'to those who, seeing the vice and misery that spring from the unequal distribution of wealth and privilege, feel the possibility of a higher social state and would strive for its attainment.' In his day they were a small, un-influential band of pilgrims; to-day they do not number scores, they number hundreds of thousands. Soon they will number millions. When they do, it will be the brightest day that ever dawned for the common people of England."

[We have much pleasure in reprinting this report of Mr. Humphries' address from the *MIDDLESEX ADVERTISER* of April 2nd, though we may point out that the term "nationalisation" is not an exact description of Henry George's teaching. "Nationalisation" has now come to mean purchase of land and management of it by the State, though at the time when Henry George came to this country the term was free from this implication and was commonly applied to his proposals.—Editor, *LAND VALUES*.]