

to those who have their means to
 "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 sacredly to the individual all that belongs to the individual."—Henry George.

THE CRISIS

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.
 —THOMAS PAINE.

Four great speeches on the land question have been delivered, and several minor ones, and yet we seem as far away as ever from firm and drastic handling of the problem. The reforms proposed by the Government are palliatives, the talk of inquiring politicians for a quarter of a century or more—the Chancellor of the Exchequer himself has said that he made identical proposals twenty-six years ago. In twenty-six years public opinion has ripened, revolutions in thought have taken place, ideas that then were only beginning to be talked of are now part of the common stock of political progress. In 1885 a Royal Commission boldly reported in favour of rating vacant land on 4 per cent. of its capital value; sixteen years later the Royal Commission on Local Taxation specified certain services as being national in character, the cost of which caused an excessive burden on local rates, and the famous minority report of that same Commission recommended a rate on land values *inter alia* to prevent landowners benefiting by further Exchequer grants towards the cost of such services; twenty-one years later a Select Committee of the House of Commons, appointed by the Liberal Government, recommended that land value should be the sole basis of rating. Yet the Chancellor of the Exchequer has not even suggested that he would adopt the mild proposal of eight-and-twenty years ago.

The Exchequer, we were told at Middlesbrough, is to bear a larger part of the burden of local services; but there is no hint that the revenue necessary to accomplish this will be raised by a tax on land values. Mr. Lloyd George has told us that the Agricultural Rates Act made a present to the landowner at the expense of the general taxpayer. The same thing surely will happen if the Education Rate is reduced without raising the money by a tax on land values.

Much has been said about overcrowding and of the high prices paid for land by local authorities; but what has yet been proposed that will afford relief to the overcrowded and over-rated tenant of the slum, or what has been said of the high prices paid for land by private individuals? The high prices paid by public authorities are but a minute fraction of the injustices of the present land system. It may be a grievance that local authorities have to pay high prices for land for housing schemes, but that is a minor and secondary grievance.

The great stumbling-block is the excessive prices which private persons have to pay; and it is because of these excessive prices that housing accommodation is dear and bad, and that any necessity arises for the municipality to step in at all. Land monopoly has increased the price of land, has restricted the production of wealth and created the slum. Land monopoly has deprived the State of its natural revenue and caused taxation and rating to be imposed on houses and the products of man's labour. So, doubly, has land monopoly, allowed by the State to continue, fostered the slum and depressed the condition of the labourer. And now the beneficent legislators turn round on us and say: "Lo, private enterprise has failed; the State must step in and provide cheap dwellings for poor people." Private enterprise has failed, burdened by the weight of land monopoly and unjust taxation, and it has failed because the State has been negligent of its duty. The time has come for removing the barriers of land monopoly and unjust taxation, not for the raising of fresh obstacles that will make the ultimate solution more difficult than ever.

The land campaign is, or should be, directed against land monopoly, and rightly so. It is land monopoly that makes land dear; it is land monopoly that by holding land out of use creates an artificial stint, causes unemployment, misery and desolation. Yet what can the Chancellor point to in his land policy that will destroy land monopoly; what can he point to that will even begin to attack it; what is there that will render it more difficult for the monopolist to hold out of use even one acre?

The Chancellor of the Exchequer is attempting to deal with the land question piecemeal, and to conciliate those parties whom he thinks most aggrieved. He attempts to satisfy by particular remedies the agricultural labourer, the local administrator, and the lessee of business premises; but what of the great mass of the people who lie outside these categories? The great community of industrial workers is not likely to feel enthusiasm for a scheme of land reform so neglectful of their needs. Sympathy for a time may lead them to accord a mild support to legislation designed for the benefit of agricultural labourers, but even that interest is likely to disappear when it is seen that this minimum wage scheme may react disastrously upon them, that it has nothing in it to increase agricultural employment, and may indeed actually diminish it, and add to the competition in the towns.

The land question is a question of land monopoly, and consequently a land values question. Land monopoly, restricting the available supply of land, is congesting population, causing unemployment and low wages, and raising the price of land. This is the situation that is to be faced. To destroy land monopoly is to destroy monopoly values. The Government's land policy is not going to reduce the value of land—so Lord Beauchamp, Lord Strachie and others have assured us.

It is therefore not going to break down land monopoly, for that would reduce the value of land.

What place should land values taxation have in a policy which seeks to maintain monopoly values, not destroy them? It is true that the Liberal Party—leaders as well as rank-and-file—have been pledged to taxation of land values for years, but all those pledges must be swept aside. To keep them would necessitate an attack on land monopoly, and that is the one thing that the official land campaigners so far refuse to do.

Yet these pledges passed at Liberal conference after Liberal conference year after year, were not mere pious expressions of opinion. For many they were, and are, the expression of a philosophy, the summation of an economic creed; and these men will hold to their creed through thick and thin, despite the ties of party discipline and affection for party leaders. These are the men who for long years have kept the land question to the front, have preached its fundamental importance. These are the men that form the backbone of the Liberal Party—the workers—thousands upon thousands of them who, without title and without honours, without thought of any personal recognition or favour, have built up the party and kept it together. All over the country they are waiting in vast multitudes for the magic word which will draw them into the fight again.

They are the men that pay allegiance to principles, not to fame and reputation. When Alexander Ure, then Solicitor-General for Scotland, and an unknown man, had his great campaign, they trooped in thousands to hear him and to cheer him to the echo. At nineteen popular demonstrations held in 1907-8 at various centres, including Glasgow, Greenock, Kilmarnock, Edinburgh, Dundee, Ayr, Larbert, Manchester, Liverpool, Birkenhead, Chesterfield, Leeds, Belfast, London and Dublin, they crowded to hear him, drawn by one magic phrase—"Land Values." They came to mass meetings that were triumphantly successful when the trained Liberal organisers of the district predicted nothing but failure. They came to meetings organised under difficulties by our own secretaries, who, like the chief speaker, had never before entered the town on any such political mission. They came for one reason, because they believed land value taxation to be the all-important question.

Once more this spirit has been tested at three great meetings held last month, at Aberdeen, Glasgow, and Dundee, and still it rings true as ever. In spite of the official land campaign, the land question is still to the multitude a land value question.

Now has come the time of crisis when Liberalism must be tried. Of the Liberalism of the rank-and-file there can be no doubt; it is still as firm fixed as ever on the destruction of land monopoly. Of the Liberalism of the leaders there may well be doubt. It may be that the Government intend to add land value taxation to their programme, but if so why has there been no word

of it? It may be that the land campaign is intended to destroy land monopoly, but if so why is there no mention of the only means of doing so?

Whichever course is taken there may be a split, but in the one case it merely means the dropping of a few—even though they be men of wealth and men of power, of a few who would inevitably be lost to the party in the steady march of progress; in the other case it means the loss of untold numbers, a disruption of the party from top to bottom, the formation of new parties and new alignments. Is it to be expected that the toiling masses who were attracted to the Liberal Party and remained with it because they believed it to be the *Liberal Party*, will still adhere to it when they see it unwilling to attack land monopoly? Already far and wide, deep and menacing, the murmurs of revolt are heard. The belief that the old Liberals will not attack land monopoly is growing; soon it will turn into conviction, and then the crisis will be precipitated that will shatter the old Liberal Party and give birth to a new.

F. R. C. D.

THE MORAL OF THE BEDFORD ESTATES DEAL.

The record sale of land in London is a convincing answer to those critics of the Government's proposals who have been declaring incessantly that these spell ruin to the landlord. Clearly, a millionaire like Mr. Mallaby-Deeley would not come forward to sink a fortune in land if he thought that the form of the investment was going to be raided within a year or so by the Treasury. So far, so good. But is the situation thus created wholly to be approved? Is it not high time that the price of land in our large cities was reduced, and can this be done until a rational system of taxing land values is adopted?—EVERYMAN, 19th December.

So gigantic a transaction as the purchase of the Duke of Bedford's Covent Garden estate by Mr. Mallaby-Deeley, the Unionist member for Harrow, has naturally aroused a great deal of public interest. The estate covers about nine acres in the heart of London, and is the site of a large number of important buildings. No disclosure has been made of the price, but the site-values involved are enormous, and it cannot amount to less than several millions. Covent Garden alone is worth about £25,000 a year. When first given to the Russells by Edward VI. its annual value was £6 6s. 8d. No wonder the *TIMES* suggests the possibility that the transaction may awaken in the breast of the Chancellor of the Exchequer some fresh scheme for the taxation of ground values and unearned increment. That it is possible for so huge a fortune to be built up from the industry of the community, without anything being given in exchange, will certainly furnish matter for thought regarding our present system of rating land in urban districts.—*NATION*, 20th December.

There is another point which should be emphasised here. We hear much nowadays of taxation of land values. We have devoted a considerable amount of space at various times to a consideration of this reform. We hold most sincerely and most firmly the idea that the present system of land taxation should be revised, and we hope that something in this direction will be done. . . . We hope to see the question of the taxation of land values taken up more strenuously by all reformers and pushed to the forefront of current politics.—*REYNOLDS'S NEWS-PAPER*, December 21st.