



LAND & LIBERTY

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AN EPOCH-MAKING BUDGET

The principle underlying this Bill is to assert the right of the community to the ownership of land. I have never made any question about that, nor that that right should be expressed in the form of a rent paid by the occupier or rather the owner of the land to the community. As I said just now, this is only the first step in the reform of our land system. The effect of that system has been to place a burden on industry of hundreds of millions a year. It has crowded our people into pestilential slums, and it has driven hundreds of thousands of people from the land into the towns to compete with the town workers, with the result that wages have been depressed and unemployment has been increased.—MR SNOWDEN'S closing words in the House of Commons Debate on the Third Reading of the Finance Act.

The advocates of a great principle should know no thought of compromise. They should proclaim it in its fullness, and point to its complete attainment as their goal. But the zeal of the propagandist needs to be supplemented by the skill of the politician. While the one need not fear to arouse opposition, the other should seek to minimize resistance. The political art, like the military art, consists in massing the greatest force against the point of least resistance; and to bring a principle most quickly and effectively into practical politics, the measure which presents it should be so moderate as (while involving the principle) to secure the largest support and excite the least resistance. For whether the first step be long or short is of little consequence. When a start is once made in the right direction, progress is a mere matter of keeping on.—HENRY GEORGE in *Protection or Free Trade*, Chap. XXII (Abridged Edition).

After a strenuous debate, lasting twenty-three days of Parliamentary time, the Finance Bill passed into law on 3rd July; and in the circumstances with a substantial majority. The measure is not so radical as the Chancellor proposed, but it must suffice. As he truly said, if we would have a more radical proposal we must first secure a more radical House of Commons. The debate from beginning to end can go on record as the greatest "Delegate Conference on the Taxation of Land Values" ever held, and where the resolutions adopted stood for legal enactment and not for mere abstract opinion.

We deplore the exemptions, all of them, including the exemptions and the concessions added to the measure in its progress through the Commons. Mr Snowden himself deplored very many of them.

As the United Committee declared by resolution at its meeting on 4th May, "on the grounds of principle, expediency and practicability the Taxation of Land Values should apply universally to all land including agricultural land and mineral land from which by these proposals (the proposals of the Finance Bill) its benefits are being withheld." But in all such cases and classes of cases one has to be content with what can be obtained even if it falls far short of the ideal. In this case we had to consider not only what was offered but the alternative which stood for some kind of chaos, probably the fall of the Government, a general election with a possible reactionary regime and an all-round tariff, instead of a tax on land values.

The British Labour Party is now once and for all officially identified with the policy of Land Value Taxation. In Labour circles here and in other lands, in America, Australia, South Africa, on the Continent and as far away as India, China and Japan, wherever Labour politics, so defined, are known to function, our forces can point to the fact that the Party in Great Britain has taken the first step in legislation towards Henry George's emancipating policy. But yesterday no such claim could be made. It would have been a disaster to the cause wherever it was being upheld, and a blow to the hopes and aspirations of millions of workers in all lands if Mr. Snowden's Finance Bill had not been put on the Statute Book.

The exemption of charitable endowments was widely canvassed in Parliament and outside. But the argument put forward on behalf of these institutions was, as usual, in substance an argument for more land value taxation, not less. If, as we believe, these landowning Charities wisely use their income to help the poor and thereby relieve the rates, or if the revenue they derive from ground rents is put to educational purposes, it is not an argument for exemption but one for an extension of the principle. If the Charities can do so much with the small share of the land values they appropriate, what could not the State do with an all-round levy? But our opponents always want it both ways. In this case they want it to be understood that when an educational or any charity endowment carries on with an income from ground rents or land values it is a beneficent mission; but when the State proposes to make any similar levy upon this communal value for any kind of public purpose the principle suddenly becomes a danger and menace to society.

Of course where these Charities play the part of the "dog in the manger" by holding land out of use they may regard the taxation of land values with so much misgiving. They want their monopoly price without offering any contribution in taxation to the cost of the services that give their land so much of its value—a selfish and indefensible claim. They should try to realize that what they lose as land speculators they will gain in the general prosperity of the community.

The debate in the Commons and the Press publicity it evoked for and against land value

taxation (mostly against) did not stop at our shores. Henry George's name was not infrequently mentioned and his philosophy was over it all. The news was for all lands, and the publicity agencies were for weeks and months working overtime on this new portent in British politics. To very many it meant the fall of the Government, and political agents were ordered to get together for an immediate general election. At more than one critical division the landlord party and their relatives were in the precincts of the House ready to celebrate the *coup d'état*. But nothing happened, and later on the "Land Song" accompanied the decisive vote on the Third Reading.

Commenting on this remarkable publicity an overseas correspondent writes:—

"Even if the whole effort were to go to pieces and be forgotten, it would have been a miracle of success. To have carried the movement to its present partial success means the release of forces which, regardless of human memory, must be a living part of the triumph which is to come some day."

We cordially endorse our correspondent's sound opinion: The passing of the Finance Act constitutes a red-letter day in the history of the movement. It is Mr Snowden's great triumph. He is the radical statesman of our day and generation who is not afraid from his high place in the State to relate land value taxation to housing, unemployment, trade depression, low wages and overcrowding. For what he has achieved he is entitled to the respect, the goodwill and even the affection of every well-intentioned citizen out "to remove want and the fear of want, to give all classes leisure, and comfort and independence, the decencies and refinements of life, the opportunities of mental and moral development." The Chancellor has given radical land reformers the great opening they have been striving to attain these past twenty years.

The Press cuttings tell, among other things, of over 100 societies that have publicly pronounced against this land value Budget. These organizations range from the Central Landowners' Association and the Land Union to the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides. The list includes the Churches, the Universities, the Playing Fields Association, the Building Societies and the Salvation Army. The spokesmen of these trusts and organizations have told us of the many hundred millions of hard-earned money they represent—all of which, or nearly all of which, belongs to the working classes. The playing fields of course were requisitioned to show the wickedness of a Government that would put a tax on healthy recreation! Yet nothing came of this agitation. Outside their own special circles, even with the Press at their command, there was no adequate response to their lamentations. They have had to admit that Mr Snowden's land value Budget was rooted in public opinion, including a due proportion of the public opinion to be found in Building Society Conventions and on the Playing Fields themselves. The Budget "land tax" was found to be built on the rock of economic principle, and when the hurricane came it stood the test.

The leaders of the Tory Party in the House of

Commons and in the country tried their best to make political capital out of this claim of the State for a share, even a small share, of its own communal earnings, but as in 1909 they could make nothing of it. The ranks of the Tory Party are honeycombed with men who stand in some degree, and stand firmly, for the land value policy. What the landlord interests in the party would like to forget is that the party contains within its ranks not only those who take the rent of land but they who pay.

In his speech in the House on 4th May Mr Baldwin (the Tory leader) paid lip-service to this sentiment. He said: "There is no more difficult and complicated subject than any subject connected with the Taxation of Land Values," and continued: "The whole question of securing the increment for the benefit of the public is a subject on which many men of all parties have been interested for many years." We should say so! Later on, stimulated by the landlord die-hards in the party, he described the land tax (Southampton, 14th June) as an impost on industry of the most vicious kind, and declared: "I can say one thing about it—that if we get back to power the tax will never see daylight."

Very likely not, but one of the designs of Mr Snowden's impost was to make it difficult, if not impossible, for the Tories to win the next election. Years ago Mr Baldwin warned his party to keep off the land value question or they would raise seven devils. The "devils" were to be found in every Tory organization then, and they are still there. Years of unemployment and trade depression together with the failure of the Government to remedy the evil have given the Tories their chance and they are out full-blooded for their emergency tariff. The fall of tariff-ridden Australia and the despairing condition of Europe with its twice ten thousand miles of tariff walls does not weigh in the argument. A tariff abroad does not lessen unemployment; but in some mysterious manner a tariff at home will be different!

The Finance Act carries Land Valuation. This is the crux of the matter. With Land Valuation the local rating of land values is within sight; without Land Valuation nothing in this direction can ever be attained. The landowning classes and their well-placed agencies know this as well as we do; more than anything else it accounts for their unrelenting opposition.

We are told that if we would have peace in industry, or at Geneva, we must first get the idea into our hearts and not merely at a Conference, and that what is urgent is a new heart. There may be something in this; but what millions of decent citizens are seeking is a new job. Their hearts may not be all they should be, but they are good enough and true enough to reach out to any kind of New Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land. "It is not in the nature of the mother's heart to send children to work when they ought to be at play." Whatever be the condition of his heart, the man who wants work is entitled to it: he is entitled to a Government that will not allow any fellow creature, nor any corporation, to stand between him and his right to maintain himself by his own labour. It is not any change in the heart of man that will bring

prosperity and progress; it is the prosperity that will give the heart the chance to express itself in better ways.

The trouble that afflicts our civilization is the desire and the ambition of our elected persons to make their own economic laws. It is difficult for them to understand why they may not indulge the passion; but the explanation is not far to seek. In these never-ending abortive attempts to cope with the ravages of unemployment they manifestly labour under the delusion that the opportunities to work are in their hands and not in the hands of the Creator. That is why they stumble and fall over the burning questions of the day; and thus it comes to pass that instead of solving social problems the problems are solving them, weak hearts and strong hearts alike.

In turning their hearts and their heads away from the elementary facts of production the politicians are no worse than the School men. In a sea of economic trouble that threatens the stability of the State these gentlemen can offer no help. They just keep on with their statistics and their hair-splitting evasions, a jargon which the press takes, or would like their public to take, for so much erudition. Verily, their talk on the problem of work and wages and how it may not be dealt with bespeaks the need not for a new heart, but a new head.

The Land Value Budget is a challenge alike to protectionist and free trader (limited). It is the beginning of sound and enduring progress, because it is rooted in the principle of social justice. It stands for access to nature's storehouse, for freedom to produce as well as to exchange goods and services. It stands for new openings to labour and capital. It stands for the release of the "body economic" from the fetters of monopoly. If we would bring people together in mutual helpfulness we must first learn the lesson that we may not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. As Henry George has it (*Social Problems*, Chap. IX.): "That which is above justice must be based on justice, and include justice. It is not by accident that, in the Hebraic religious development which through Christianity we have inherited, the declaration, 'The Lord thy God is a just God, precedes the sweeter revelation of a God of Love.'"

Mr Snowden's Land Value Budget has political significance of a far-reaching character. Rightly understood and placed in its relation to the imperative needs of our day, it is the dawn of a new era.

J. P.

Progress and Poverty. By HENRY GEORGE. Fifty-second Anniversary Edition, printed from new type: Red cloth, 1s. (postage 3d.). In extra quality binding, gold lettering and gilt top: Marone limp rexine, 2s. (3d.), dark green limp rexine, 3s. (3d.).

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The Condition of Labour. An Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII. By HENRY GEORGE. With Encyclical Letter of Pope Leo XIII, May 15th, 1891. Red cloth, 1s. (2d.).

THE TOLPUDDLE MARTYRS

This is the true tale,* well told, of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, one of the great political outrages committed against the poor in the name of justice before their enfranchisement made such wrongs dangerous to their oppressors. Mr Rattenbury has collected the facts from all available sources, including Lord Melbourne's papers, George Loveless's Diary and contemporary letters, newspapers and pamphlets, putting them together in a connected story that stirs the imagination and must arouse indignation in all lovers of justice.

Here it is in short. In 1833 six Dorset agricultural labourers whose wages had been reduced from 9s. to 7s. per week met to found a Union to protect themselves from further degradation and to work for the improvement of their lot. For this awful crime in 1834 they were committed to prison by a local magistrate named Frampton, tried at the Assizes, sentenced to seven years' penal servitude, and transported, one to Tasmania and the rest to Australia, where their life was one of slavery and hardship almost unthinkable.

To ensure conviction they were tried by a rascally judge, Baron Williams, under a Mutiny Act which applied only to the Navy, not to civilians. This creature, refusing the defence relevant cross-examination, acted the part of prosecutor, bullied one witness into giving false evidence so as to incriminate one defendant who was not implicated, and pronounced judgment, in his own words—"Not for anything that you have done, or, as I can prove, that you intended to do, but for example to others, I consider it my duty to pass sentence of seven years' penal transportation across His Majesty's high seas to each and every one of you."

Exposed in the House of Commons by Thomas Wakley, M.P., founder of the *Lancet*, and alarmed by popular demonstrations all over the country, the Government was frightened into shortening the term, issuing a free pardon, and bringing back their victims at public expense. Five of them were devout, temperate, high-minded Methodists. All acted like heroes. But the outstanding hero was a sturdy Wesleyan local preacher, George Loveless, whose spirit is shown in the words of a song written as he left the court on receiving sentence, and which became a battle cry of the Trade Unionists of the time:

God is our guide: from field, from wave,
From plough, from anvil, and from loom,
We come our country's rights to save,
And speak the tyrant faction's doom;
We raise the watchword "Liberty,"
We will, we will, we will be free.

God is our guide; no swords we draw,
We kindle not war's battle fires,
By reason, union, justice, law,
We claim the birthright of our sires;
We raise the watchword "Liberty,"
We will, we will, we will be free.

A picture of the cruelty and stupidity of affrighted privilege, the infamy of the convict system, and the utter helplessness of the landless labourer, from which his Unions and his vote have begun to deliver him, but for which economic freedom is the only deliverance, this story should be read by every social reformer, and especially every Land Reformer.

H. G. CHANCELLOR.

* *Flame of Freedom.* By Owen Rattenbury. Epsworth Press, London. 3s. 6d.

Subscriptions to the "Land & Liberty" Sustention Fund for 1931 will be gladly welcomed.