



LAND & LIBERTY

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FIRST THINGS FIRST

"Twenty centuries have almost gone since over the stable in Bethlehem of Judea the angels sang their song of 'Peace on Earth, to men good will.' Yet never before has the earth seen such monstrous armies; never before has human ingenuity and human industry been devoted to the preparation of such terrific engines of destruction. A few years ago I came across the Atlantic with an American inventor. We were talking of the possibilities of aerial navigation, of the time when man might at last gratify that desire that has probably been latent in every human breast since the first man witnessed the graceful flight of the bird. He said to me that in his opinion it was merely the question of commercial demand, and added: 'Do you know what to-day is the most certain road to profit for the inventor? If he invents anything that is to augment the comfort of men there is toil, trouble and worry, and in nine cases out of ten failure before him. The thing on which he can certainly succeed, the thing for which he can get money, is to invent something that will destroy life and property a little quicker, and the governments of the world will make haste to pay him any price for it.'"

"Take the answer of science or the answer of religion, and is it not obvious that we are all here, not with the right to claim equal conditions, not with the right to say to another man, because you have more than I, you must give up a part to me, but with the right to the equal use of natural opportunities."—Henry George, in an Address to the Universal Peace Union, N.Y., 25th August, 1889.

The General Election of 1929 has passed into history. The overwhelming vote against the Government at the polls has given general satisfaction. It was in essence a protectionist Government. Its "safeguarding" policy was easily seen through as a mean and a dishonest attempt to take in at the back entrance what had been time and again summarily dismissed from the front door. Once again the electorate has with emphasis declared its adherence to the free trade principle. The vote is an instruction to the new Government to abolish

the tariffs that during the past four years have added to the cost of living, reduced purchasing power and raised false hopes of additional employment that were not, and could not possibly be realized.

The late Government came in to save the country from some sort of concocted red peril and it went out on a feeble enough cry that the danger was still lurking round the corner. It will be known, and by its own choice, as the "Safety First Government." In 1924 the Wolf that was sure to come did not appear, and in 1929 the mention of its name failed entirely to hurry anyone to the polling station. This time the record of the Government was the impelling force behind the voter, and it was more than sufficient to bring about a much needed change.

Here is what the *Spectator* has to say on the downfall of Mr Baldwin's second administration:—

"Times without number the *Spectator* has pledged itself to support Mr Baldwin so long as he marshalled the forces of Progressive Unionism, and he had no more loyal supporter in the Press than this newspaper. We believed so entirely in the genuineness of his devotion to progressive causes, as we still do, that we frequently withheld criticism because we hoped that sooner or later the strong lead would be forthcoming." The strong lead was wanting to the end and the criticism of the *Spectator*, no longer withheld, continues: "With de-rating, however, and with the policy of colonial development, the Government failed dismally to put its fingers on the nation's pulse."

Turning to the case for international affairs the *Spectator* comments:—

"But it was in its handling of foreign policy that the late Government was most to blame, and, in the light of subsequent events, Mr Baldwin's choice of Sir Austen Chamberlain as Foreign Secretary was not a happy one."

In its condemnation of the De-rating Act the *Spectator* has unerringly pointed to the class legislation of the Government. As we have already emphasized it is a measure that is designed to protect and endow the land monopoly, adding no less than £35,000,000 a year to taxes on transport trade and industry. Manifestly the Government that fell because it had not the wit to put its finger on the nation's pulse had no difficulty in putting its hand in the nation's purse, for the express benefit of the landed interest. At the General Election of 1924 Mr Baldwin said he was against the taxation of land values. He forgot to say that his intention was to place special taxation on industry, and wages, for the defined benefit of the land speculator.

As we write the latest illustration of this hostile influence on improvement comes to us from the Middlesex County Council at its meeting on 6th June. The Council is seeking a piece of land for some new road and a small Committee was appointed to purchase by "negotiation." The Chairman, Mr Button (*Manchester Guardian* report), said:—

"It was common knowledge that whenever it became known that the Council required land or other property in connection with road construction

the price was put up against the Council." In the discussion Mr E. C. Fawley observed: "that on one occasion the Council were offered six and a half acres for £4,800. Someone else secured the land and later the Council were offered a portion at the rate of £2,000 an acre. On another occasion land which had been purchased at £90 an acre was offered to the Council at £1,000 an acre. These facts emphasized the need for secrecy in the Council's intention to purchase land."

It is a glaring public scandal—a piece of sheer daylight robbery, and it is not alone the experience of the Middlesex County Council. Other municipal councils can tell a similar story. The blame does not altogether rest with the landlords, though they cannot very well complain when their unjust exactions provoke so much bitter hostility against them. The blame rests chiefly with those who stubbornly refuse to give their thoughts and their energies to the radical cure for the injustice, and with those who admitting the injustice lack the courage to put an end to it.

But the volume of sentiment for radical land reform persists in spite of the setbacks and the silence of former adherents. Like the Seven Sleepers, when the door is opened at election times the Taxation of Land Values is found to be more alive than ever before. The people have once more returned a House of Commons with a majority pledged to land value legislation and this time there is the assurance that something will be achieved. In his manifesto to the electors the new Prime Minister, Mr Ramsay MacDonald, explicitly declared in favour of taxing land values, and we have Mr Philip Snowden's word for it that he will introduce the necessary measure without delay.

A Liberal candidate at the recent election acknowledging receipt of a set of the election leaflets issued by the United Committee wrote: "I find them most instructive. I am in favour of the Taxation of Land Values; the difficulty is to get the people to allow us to make it a capital issue." We cannot very well follow this line of reasoning, especially as the candidate's election address had no reference to the question. In any case both the Labour Party and the Liberal Party are firmly pledged to the reform and the new Chancellor of the Exchequer intends making it a "capital issue."

Unemployment was the main issue of the election and it was made abundantly clear that the new Government are expected to clear the decks for immediate action. What is going to be attempted? If it is to be on the lines of State grants for road making and subsidies for housing then we venture to affirm that the number of the unemployed will not be reduced, not even to normal proportions. The experience of the Middlesex County Council gives the reason why. Public money for land purchase schemes can only raise land values and "enrich the landowners beyond the dreams of avarice." But the mischief will not stop at putting new money into the landlord's pockets. It will whet their appetite for still further gains and everywhere, in every part of the country, the land will be more firmly locked against labour and enterprise. In other words without land values taxation

development and reconstruction schemes will produce more unemployment. If such schemes could function for the employment of labour why is it that unemployment keeps pace with industrial advance? Why cannot the votaries of such schemes answer that question?

No one disputes that it is better to have men at work than waste their time and their lives on the "dole." What is in dispute is the contention that the improvement of "our national estate" will lead to new openings. It would be all right if the land of the country was "our national estate." But it is not, and no amount of sophistry or metaphorical language will make it ours. It is the landowners' estate and credits schemes based on platform rhetoric will not alter or modify the experience.

We are assured by some people keen to solve the problem that "we can throw off the national shoulders this Old Man of the Sea of unemployment if we have the will; and that we have the men, the money and the management." We are not so sure that "we" have the money, but the men and the management seem to be available. There is just one thing wanting and that is the land value policy. Without it what can the new Government do? Nothing more than the late Government, and that was less than nothing.

Economic law and its workings cannot be adjusted to suit the peculiar notions of the experts who innocently take the landowners' estate to be "ours." Economic law is not theirs to do with it what they like, and in its workings will not get on to their side of the argument. They must get on to the side of economic law, if they would exercise their talents for the good of the community. The law of rent, roads or no roads, slums, or no slums, will remain the centre of things and what is required is a reform that will assert the right to the equal use of natural opportunities.

Disarmament was another issue of the election, but at points in the discussion it was not infrequently overshadowed by the cry of work and wages for the million victims of industrial distress. Disarmament is closely related to unemployment though those who plead for no more war as a rule fail to recognize the connection. Yet it has to be admitted that the workers who rely on the armament industry for a living, at home and in other lands, constitute in themselves a passive but nevertheless a formidable obstacle to all peace propaganda. If ever this great body of men are to be freed from reliance on this industry for a living it must be through alternative employment.

At every turning the unemployed class determines the condition of all employed in field, factory and workshop, as it accounts for the imprisonment of men condemned to produce "the terrific engines of destruction that are intended to destroy life and property." The curse of unemployment can be removed, but only by opening the door to true freedom. Land value taxation and free trade is presented as a means to this end. It will emancipate industry from the fetters of monopoly and open up the way to a better understanding in international affairs.

J. P.