

## PUBLIC CONFERENCE IN MANCHESTER

On October 19, at the Onward Hall in Manchester, the Public Conference convened jointly by the Manchester Land Values League and the United Committee met with considerable success. As it was held in the height of the General Election campaign it had to contend with meetings held at the same time by the several parties, and therefore the attendance was not as large as might have been expected. Replies to the invitation had come from a number of bodies intimating the appointment of delegates; as for example, the National Union of Manufacturers, the Auctioneers' and Estate Agents' Institute, Ratepayers' Associations, Co-operative Societies and political associations. At the evening session the general public was in greater force, and at that session the questions and debates were particularly keen.

Mr. Sydney Needoff, B.A., and Mr. Fredk. Bentley presided respectively at the afternoon and evening sessions. The speakers responsible for moving and supporting the resolutions (which were subsequently carried unanimously) were, in the afternoon: A. W. Madsen, London, Ashley Mitchell, Huddersfield, V. H. Blundell, London, and Councillor H. Eastwood, Manchester; in the evening: F. R. Jones, Liverpool, V. G. Saldji, London, and J. D. Slater, Rossendale.

Subject of the afternoon session was "Local Taxation and Municipal Reform" and the topics covered by the speakers may thus be summarised:

Incidence of the rates as at present levied; attested as a cause of restricted development, overcrowding, house famine and exorbitant rents; operation of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1947, with its "development charge" and other financial provisions; part played by the "Derating" Acts, 1929, in depriving local authorities of revenue; local self-government imperilled by dependence on Treasury subventions and control from Whitehall; this danger not averted but aggravated by Local Government Act, 1948; the valuation being made under that Act; growing demand for repeal or drastic amendment of the measures named; reform of the whole system, providing adequate revenues and with beneficial social and economic results, by levy of rates on land values exempting all buildings and improvements.

Subject of the evening session was "Industry, Employment, Trade and Taxation" thus dealing with the broader aspects of the land question. It would occupy much space to report the several speeches, all of them informative and challenging, Mr. V. G. Saldji incidentally giving with diagram an excellent exposition of the Law of Rent. The various topics dealt with from the platform were:

Ethical considerations as to property and taxation; thus defining what belongs to the community and what belongs to the individual; the rent of land as public revenue, but State imposition upon private property (the wages of labour and what anyone produces) has no moral sanction; the meaning of land value taxation; corresponding remission of taxes on wages and results of industry in the many forms that these taxes take; abolition of tariffs and other barriers against trade, including exchange controls; abandonment of subsidies that rob Peter to pay Paul; no place for a coercive and monopolistic "planned economy" restricting or penalising competitive private enterprise, but establishment of a free economy under equal rights and equal opportunity; production thus

liberated the saviour of society, raising high the standard of those who work for a living. The world outlook; landlordism the fundamental cause of misery among the peoples whom it is thought to help by Colombo and Truman "Point 4" plans and the like.

The resolutions submitted by the Conveners, which had been circularised with the invitations had, as stated, unanimous approval and accordingly the Conference declared:

### I

This Conference calls for the reform of the present rating system because of its inequity, the tax it inflicts upon houses and other buildings and improvements, the exemptions and reliefs it confers upon privileged interests, its failure thereby to respond to revenue needs and the consequent threat to local self-government by ever-increasing dependence upon Treasury subventions and Whitehall controls;

"The Conference declares that since land values arise entirely from the presence and activities of the community, including the expenditure on public services, it is from that source that public revenues should be derived;

"The Conference therefore urges (1) the assessment of all land apart from buildings and improvements at its true market value unrestricted as to its use; (2) the levy of rates thereon exempting buildings and improvements; and (3) the repeal or amendment of any statutory provisions, as in the "Derating" Acts, 1929, the Town and Country Planning Act, 1947, and the Local Government Act, 1948, which stand in the way of this achievement."

### II

"This Conference declares that the land belongs to the people and that land rent is the source from which public revenue should be drawn in place of existing taxes which penalise industry and productive enterprise; that the freedom of production and the freedom of trade, under equal right and opportunity, are the essential conditions for resolving the social, industrial and financial problems with which the country is faced; for establishing these conditions, the Conference urges that all landholders should be required to contribute to the public revenue in proportion to the value of the land that they hold, and that the tariffs, exchange controls and other barriers in restraint of trade be abolished. This practical policy is expressed by the Taxation of Land Values and Free Trade."

## SITE VALUE RATING ENQUIRY

The "Simes Committee" to which reference is made in the Conservative replies is the Inter-Departmental Committee on Site Value Rating, a body of 10 persons with Mr. Erskine Simes, K.C., as Chairman, appointed in December, 1947, to consider and report upon the "practicability and desirability" of meeting a part of local expenditure by a rate levied upon a separate assessment of site values, *having regard to the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Acts and other factors.* We print in italics the rider to the terms of reference. It is extremely significant for the way in which it tied the hands of the Committee to possible absurd or noxious recommendations. To date, after nearly four years' consideration, no report has been issued.