

## THE MENACE OF UNEMPLOYMENT

(From the Report of Speeches delivered at the Public Session of the International Conference in Edinburgh)

On Thursday, 1st August, the International Conference held a public session and demonstration, the Assembly Hall of the Conference being attended by a large and most interested audience.

**Councillor G. W. Crawford**, of Edinburgh, presided and the speakers were Mr James Scott, M.P., Rev. Herbert S. Bigelow, of Cincinnati, and Mr Andrew MacLaren, M.P.

**The Chairman** introduced the speakers in a brief address, applauding the aims and objects of the Conference under whose auspices the meeting was being held and expressing his great satisfaction that Edinburgh had been chosen for the gathering in such large numbers of the followers of Henry George from many lands.

**Mr James Scott, M.P.:** "I have the privilege of addressing this meeting to-night as one who for many years has advocated the cause of the taxation of land values, as one who still believes in it and who intends to do all he can both in and out of Parliament to have the taxation of land values made a part of the economic system of Britain. When the present Chancellor of the Exchequer puts on his taxation of land values in his March Budget, he will not take the country by surprise, and he will get an astounding amount of common consent to doing it. Speaking as a humble member of the Liberal Party, I certainly think the support of the Liberal Party will not be wanting to Mr Snowden in regard to that.

"If we had had taxation of land values the whole housing difficulties that we have experienced would not have existed. The putting of the burden on the land would at once have put into the market ample supplies of land upon which the houses could have been built, and in ordinary logical consequence the building material would have been less costly, the rents would have been lower, prices would have been lower, and by this time of day we would have had a contented, happily housed population. By the De-rating and Local Government Bill which was passed in the spring of this year, I think the tangle is a hundred times worse than it was before. I strongly opposed that measure, and I shall continue to do all I can and not rest until we have it amended. I am driven to this conclusion, that all the remedies that have been tried, by subsidies for agriculture and subsidies for housing, are worse than useless, because, as subsidies invariably do, they go into the wrong pockets and do not help the right people, and they do not provide the land, and they do not provide the houses; and that there is only one true and effective lever which can be applied, and applied where its force will most be felt, namely, the economic one of a tax upon the real capital value of land. The values of all the land repose in the minds of every level-headed valuer in the country. *They know!* I say that these facts ought to be put in a column in the Valuation Roll, and that both the Imperial Parliament and the Local Authorities ought to be empowered to impose a modest tax to begin with, and an increasing tax as it is required, upon this capital value." (Applause.)

**Rev. Herbert S. Bigelow:** "The conviction that has grown upon me as I have listened to the most interesting sessions of this Conference, is this, that you ought to have help in funds from all the world at this time so that in the next nine months you may send your best speakers before every Labour Union, and indeed every church pulpit that may be open to them, to preach the gospel of Henry George clearly and fervently up to the time of your next budget-making. Enough of a social

crisis is on among you, and there is such a favourable combination of political and social circumstances with you, that your people will listen and will understand; and here, of all the world, is the place to tell this story now.

"Isn't it obvious that if there was a way of sweeping the tax burden off from industry, that would be the same as giving the working people and the consumers of Great Britain an equivalent increased purchasing power? To the extent that it is so, there would be a consequent increased demand for the products of labour, an increase in the opportunities of those seeking employment, an absorption of the unemployed, and a solution of the problem, without the necessity of doing many of the things that are contemplated, and that possibly might be done, without success. But where will this tax burden be put? We say it should be put in the only place where you can put taxes without raising prices, namely, upon the land values of the community. If you put your tax burden on commodities, you raise prices. If you take them off commodities and redistribute them upon land values, while you increase the purchasing power of the people by reducing the prices of commodities, you also increase their purchasing power by reducing the selling price of land.

"The problem of statesmanship is to capture for public purposes, to the complete relief of all people who are paying taxes in increased prices mostly upon the products of labour, these enormous appropriations of land value. As Henry George pointed out, the only orderly and feasible way to capture these values for public purposes and relieve industry of the burden of taxation, is to cause to be valued every spot of ground in the nation, no matter what its character or use, disregarding improvements, and get a scientific appraisal of the unimproved value of that land and make every landholder in the community pay to communal purposes a fair and approximately full measure of the annual social value of the land.

"Dare any of us say that there is a single child on this Island, no matter how humble or how poor its parentage, but that has an equal right with every other child to a place on this Island? But these are hollow words if we do not understand, or if we are not going to tell, how that place can be secured. The message we try to bring is that the only way that you can secure to every child its God-given equal right to the earth, is not to divide the earth every little while—that under our complex civilization is impossible—but to so levy your taxes that labour will be free of all tax burdens and that land, by reason of this assessment of taxes against the value of land, will also be free. You cannot do that without studying the application of these moral principles to economics. If you have made up your mind and if you come, as most of us have, to agree with Henry George that this is the way to do it, then you are up against this, that it is the political power that must do it. Your interest in the child and its God-given right must, in the end, if you are going to be thorough about it, lead you over into the political field to demand that this power should be used to do this thing.

"I hope the time has come in Great Britain when organized labour and organized religion may unite to apply to the social institutions here the Gospel of the Nazarene, to translate into law and social institutions this doctrine that we have been preaching so long, but not practising—the doctrine of the fatherhood of God



ANDREW MACLAREN, M.P.

numerous mosaics of all the dreamers in the world." (Loud applause.)

**Councillor Andrew MacLaren, M.P.:** "Edinburgh has slums that are only equalled by those we have over in Glasgow. Have you read the Scottish Housing Report issued by the Government last year? Have you read the Medical Officer's submission to the Government last year? Houses—gaps in the walls, two or three families living in one room, vermin infesting the places, and disease running rampant! And we are spending millions per annum through the Ministry of Health, paying large sums for clinics, doctors, research departments, health establishments, all over the country. I venture to say that 90 per cent of the money spent by the Ministry of Health in this country might as well have been thrown into the North Sea.

"To-day in the British House of Commons we know full well that many thousands of men could be employed in rebuilding the houses of this country. The slums, antiquated roads and narrow streets could be removed, and in that way men could be kept busy for many years to come. How do you propose to give new houses? 'Oh,' say the Government, 'subsidies.' I endorse what has already been said, that you cannot solve housing by subsidies. You have a housing problem because wages are low and the cost of housing is high. Subsidies do not lower the cost of building material or cheapen land or increase wages. Subsidies, being a contribution from tax, mean an increase of tax and an increase in the cost of building materials when those who own them know that the Government is subsidising. We propose to remove the rates off the houses of the people and from off the back of that man who wants to build a house, and levy the rates and taxes upon the enormous values of the cities and the lands surrounding these cities, and the land of the countryside.

"This is the fiftieth year since the publication of the most masterly book that has ever been scored on the question of economics—*Progress and Poverty*, by Henry George. There it has stood in the libraries for fifty years. And yet we have men who proclaim themselves intelligent, who say they do not know why we have got unemployment and poverty. *Progress and Poverty* is the reply to every problem that arises in the House of Commons. There is no solution to the problem of poverty outside of the propositions laid down in *Progress and Poverty*. Even the uncultured man of the countryside who cannot even read, instinctively knows that if you keep him from the land he must become a beggar.

"What about this thing called capitalism? Who is the capitalist? He is the man who owns works. All right; what about it? Suppose he owned a million

and the brotherhood of man. Then we may build a church like that which the dramatist described—not a mere heap of brick and stone, but a living church: the pillars of it go up like the brawny trunks of heroes; the sweet human flesh of men and women is moulded among its bulwarks, strong, impregnable; the faces of little children are laughing out of every cornice stone; the expanding arches of it are the joining hands of comrades; and up on the walls are inscribed the

works and he opened the gates and blew a whistle and nobody came in: what would happen? He would be in the asylum. The capitalist builds his factories and his works; he blows his whistle and they come rushing in the gate. But who drives them in? Is it the whistle that he blows? No; it is poverty. It is poverty that drives the masses to the workshop gate, and they are driven there because they are landless, uprooted from the right to live in their country, and they must sell their bodies at the factory gates.

"Trade unions do not determine wages; Acts of Parliament do not determine wages; wages are determined by the unemployed man competing to get your job. Use this instrument of taxation to break the power of land monopoly by opening these natural opportunities for men to employ themselves upon the land of England and Scotland and of other countries, and this unemployed army then begins to disappear. It is only as the competitive mass of unemployed outside begin to disappear that the wages of the men in the factory gates begin to rise. Removing rates and taxes from the food and houses and the other necessities will increase your wages by that amount which you now pay in tribute. It will not only do that, but it will make landlordism powerless in withholding land from use, and instead of our people living in these fetid slums you would then have cheaper houses, you would then have cheaper land, you would have untaxed houses, you would have new cities, new health, and the necessity of spending those millions on health and public charity in general would be wiped out."

**Mr P. Wilson Raffan, ex-M.P.:** "We have had a really magnificent meeting, and we are all deeply indebted to the three gentlemen who have delivered such magnificent speeches, and I am sure we would not desire to separate without conveying to them our hearty and enthusiastic thanks for the inspiration which they have given us. (Applause.) They will best be repaid if we carry out the message Mr Bigelow gave us, and make this meeting a starting point for a great agitation reviving the agitations of long ago, which will go on unhesitating and unrelenting and see the Budget through."

Mr Raffan's motion, seconded in a brief speech by Mr W. H. Renwick, of Australia, was carried with acclamation and a vote of thanks was cordially conveyed to Councillor Crawford for presiding.

Australian visitors to the Conference included Mr W. H. Renwick who is President of the Henry George Foundation of Australia, Mr and Mrs A. M. Kirkland, Melbourne, Victoria, Messrs W. A. Wickham and E. J. Craigie, Secretary of the Henry George League of South Australia. Mr Craigie was appointed official delegate to represent the Australian Leagues. He is Editor of *The People's Advocate* and has been eighteen years Secretary of the League. He is a candidate for the State Parliament, and is contesting the Flinders Division at the forthcoming triennial election in April of next year. He stands as a Single Tax candidate and has good prospects of winning on that ticket.

Since his arrival in Britain, Mr Craigie has addressed meetings under the auspices of the Yorkshire, Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham Leagues. Before sailing for home he is to address a series of meetings in the Burslem Division of Stoke. Reports of his speeches, and letters signed by him, have appeared in the *Keighley News*, *Yorkshire Observer*, *Birmingham Gazette*, *Midland Guardian*, as well as in the *Town Crier* and *Telephone*, both of Smethwick.