

## LIBERAL LIBERTY LEAGUE

### THE LIBERAL ASSEMBLY

The Liberal Party Assembly will be held on February 1 to 3, in the Kingsway Hall, Kingsway, London, W.C.2. The Preliminary Agenda was issued on November 27, with the direction that any amendments or new resolutions were to be submitted to L.P.O. Headquarters, 22, Gaybere Street, S.W.1, not later than January 8. The vital and by far the most important resolution on the agenda, is that on "Full Employment," which embodies in general terms and at some length the proposals contained in Sir William Beveridge's book *Full Employment in a Free Society*. To that the League has submitted a comprehensive amendment, which calls for the destruction of monopoly and the liberation of productive enterprise from its present burdens and handicaps by policies designed to attain full freedom of production and trade. An amendment has been submitted also to the official resolution on the "Liberty of the Subject." The final agenda of the Assembly is to be circulated on January 22, and thereupon the amendments submitted by the various affiliated bodies will be made public. Full text of the League's amendments will appear in next month's issue of *Land and Liberty*.

Official Resolution No. 2 on the Preliminary Agenda of the Liberal Assembly deals with Housing. The fourth clause reads:

"Liberals have repeatedly declared their belief in the policy of the taxation and rating of land values, and if that policy had been accepted we believe many of the difficulties now to be overcome would have been avoided. The first essential for such a reform is the valuation of all land separated from buildings. Nothing would stimulate building more than the relief of buildings from rates—and the levying of them on the unimproved value instead, following the practice successfully applied in Australia and New Zealand. The Liberal Party will continue to agitate for this reform."

The text of this declaration is sound enough, but it plays a subordinate role in the statement of housing policy. Moreover, the taxation and rating of land values is kept altogether out of sight in the No. 1, "Full Employment" resolution, as officially submitted, which with its other faults denies by implication that the land question and taxes on trade and industry have any bearing on the poverty and unemployment problems. The Full Employment resolution is shot through with proposals for State management and controls of industry and commerce, which are not only dangerous in the extreme but are in absolute conflict with the true conception of a Liberal State. It is at least disquieting to find that, before the Assembly has a chance to pronounce upon them, they are being publicly proclaimed as "Liberal policy" by various speakers who, whatever office they hold, are certainly not entitled to commit the Party to policies it has not yet either approved or endorsed. We see in this a repetition of what happened on the eve of the previous Assembly, when under authority of the Liberal Executive a whole series of booklets were published making a programme of proposals upon which no constituency association had been consulted, and which did much to tie the hands of the Assembly itself.

Meanwhile the accepted and declared policy of the Party is that "Liberals would, and could, grapple with the problem of unemployment by breaking the land monopoly." These words are taken from the leaflet issued by the Women's Liberal Federation in 1935, before the last General Election, and a timely service would be the republication of that leaflet; it stated so clearly and emphatically that

"idle land means idle men," and appealed so assuredly to the electors that "equality of opportunity and social justice can be secured through the taxation of land values." The pledge is explicit and implicit in the oft-repeated declarations in Liberal prints and at Liberal Assemblies. Is it now to be smothered or revoked, giving way to the policies of spending money to make work, with the necessary controls and direction of a "planned economy" and (as we see it) the recession of wealth-production and ultimate impoverishment of the State? Of all our political questions or social and economic reforms, two are paramount. One is the land question; the other is the unequivocal opening of British ports to the commerce of the world, irrespective of the practices adopted by other countries. The forthcoming Liberal Assembly meets at a crisis in the affairs of the party. It will have to make decisions fateful for all party adherents as well as all who know that in the freedom and equality of real Liberalism lies the only hope of recovery out of this welter of war.

A letter has been sent to all members of the League which concludes with the request, on behalf of the Hon. Treasurer, that as the League's activities have caused a big drain on its finances, and in the ensuing year the need of funds will be greater still, each should make the 1945 subscription as early and as generous as he or she can. The League enrolls members at 5s. (minimum) subscription, and it appeals for donations for the advancement of its work. All who are moved to help in that way should communicate with the Hon. Treasurer, L.L.L., 4, Great Smith Street, London, S.W.1.

### THE SAVOY LUNCHEON

There was a long and excellent account in the *British Weekly*, November 23 (by the Editor, Mr. Thomas Graham) of the "Liberal Revival" Luncheon, which the League held at the Savoy Hotel on November 16. Mr. Ashley Mitchell's address, as we gave it ourselves last month, was extensively reported. In the space given to Mr. T. Atholl Robertson's opening speech, the "British Weekly" reported his reference to the statement by Mr. Elliot Dodds, that "Liberalism has been in eclipse for 25 years," and to the determination of the League to get away from eclipse and on to the road where the sun was rising. Their effort, Mr. Robertson said, was being made in response to a growing demand from all sorts of people for a real Liberal policy on essential things. He was glad to say that they were drawing to their membership old and young from all parts of the country. They wanted to restore to a proper perspective the two questions of Land Monopoly and Free Trade. They wanted taxation and rating of land values with the exemption of industry and thrift from penal taxation. In his opinion there was no place in British politics for a Liberal Party which was not also a convinced Free Trade party. The demand for Free Trade must be clear, whatever other countries might do. To an island people like the British, Free Trade was an absolute necessity.

In his further account Mr. Thomas Graham referred to the presence at the lunch of Free Churchmen like Dr. A. J. Grieve, Dr. S. M. Berry and some prominent laymen. He had conversation with Mr. Wilfrid Harrison, Treasurer of the League, and member of the Presbyterian Church at Finchley, who explained that the new movement would work inside the Liberal Party, and had been founded because of concern about the Socialistic leanings of some members of the Party. Mr. Harrison, alluding to the

support of Free Church ministers and laity, remarked that Liberals looked to the Free Churches for the ethical basis of their policy. "We know," he added, "that if the Free Churches died out, so would Liberalism; the love of liberty that created the Free Churches is the soul of Liberalism." Mr. Graham said it was interesting to learn the Presbyterian connections of Mr. T. Atholl Robertson, the vice-chairman of this new movement. He is a cousin of Dr. James Robertson, a great Moderator of the General Assembly, and is himself chairman of the managers' board of the Palmers Green Presbyterian Church of England.

A new special publication of the League is in preparation: a pamphlet entitled "The True Mission of Liberalism," reporting the proceedings and the speeches at the Luncheon. It is intended for general circulation; copies price 3d. each.

### THE REFORMERS

I could groan aloud when I hear people talking of reforming Great Britain after the war by imposing political and economic systems which would subordinate the individual to the community and would restrict our liberty.

This used to be the attitude of the extreme Right, and would be again, if sensible people do not keep an eye on them. It is at present the attitude of the extreme Left. . . . All these ideologists could offer us would be an economic experiment, which might succeed or might not; and what they would take away from us would not be the power to chatter but the right to report on that experiment and its bearing on the material and spiritual existence of man. Their proposal to restrict liberty would sacrifice to a dubious to-day all the tomorrows which would be given us by the unpredictable developments of a free humanity. . . . I see this attitude being bitterly resented after the war, when the bill has to be footed; and it appals me that the situation is not being handled by the political parties which are traditionally associated with the defence of the man in the street and his right to manage his own affairs.—Rebecca West, in articles in the *Sunday Chronicle*, December 17.

Delightfully irrelevant was the remark by Dr. Thomas Jones in his "Mr. Churchill at Seventy" tribute to the Prime Minister, in the "Observer," November 26, that "Beveridge is the Adam Smith of to-day, and Full Employment in a Free Society may be the revolutionary road to 'The Wealth of Nations.'" The dragging in of this bit of extravaganzas must have amused Mr. Churchill. As for Adam Smith, may he have room to turn in his grave.

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