

LIBERAL LIBERTY LEAGUE AND THE LIBERAL ASSEMBLY

AT THE Liberal Assembly in London, February 1 to 3, the Liberal Liberty League, itself affiliated with the party, proposed to amend the official resolution on "Full Employment" by substituting a declaration the key-note of which was its demand for the destruction of monopoly and the liberation of productive enterprise by policies designed to attain full freedom of production and trade. It called for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade and asked the Assembly to renounce any plans or proposals which involve increased regimentation of the individual, permit an arbitrary restriction of imports, make our fiscal policy depend on that of other countries, use taxes or loans or the manipulation of money to give subsidies or other financial benefits to sectional interests, and contemplate the unbalancing of budgets and the expansion of the public debt on the assumption that taking money from some and transferring it to others will advantage the community. The keynote of the official resolution, on the other hand, was "the adoption of a policy of maintaining by adequate public and private expenditure, a demand for the products of industry which is sufficient to absorb the whole man-power of the nation."

The official resolution was an attempt to state in as few words as possible the policy set forth in Sir William Beveridge's book, *Full Employment in a Free Society*, and it was taken for granted by all concerned that it was that policy and its implications (which the Amendment quite truly depicted) which was in debate. And to serve still better the purposes of the debate, the Liberal Liberty League circulated to as many of the delegates as it could reach, and to representative Liberals all over the country, a document it had received from a Fellow Delegate quoting significant paragraphs from the book, in the expectation that the *ipsissima verba* of Sir William himself would leave no one in doubt about the direction in which the Party was being led. The same was sent to the Press with a covering letter, as to the recipients among the Liberal party, insisting that the resolution ignored the bearing of the land monopoly and repressive taxation on the poverty and unemployment problems; it was shot through with proposals for State management and controls of industry and commerce, not only dangerous in the extreme but absolutely in conflict with the true contention of a Liberal State. Several papers remarked that "as these papers have gone to those in favour of the resolution, including doubtless Sir William Beveridge, it will not be surprising if they are dealt with in advance." They were. Sir William in his speech moving the resolution, indicated to the Assembly that he had been misquoted or misrepresented, that the document was untrustworthy and the best place for it was the waste-paper basket. The quotations have been most carefully checked and Sir William has since by letter been given the opportunity, which is still open to him, to clarify his assertion.

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The fate of the Amendment was a foregone conclusion; it was rejected by a considerable majority after no more than perfunctory discussion. The mover of the Amendment (Mr. Ashley Mitchell) and the seconder (Mr. T. Atholl Robertson) had between them fifteen minutes, whereas the mover of the resolution (Sir William Beveridge) and the seconder (Mr. Elliot Dodds) had between them 35 minutes. Seven speakers got in their

hurried remarks in the two minutes each was allowed, and the debate was closed with many who had sent up their names still desiring to take part. The big battalions, instigated and led by the platform party, were determined upon the passing of the resolution as a signal mark of acclamation to their (as they deemed) politically valuable new recruit. Had not the President, Lady Violet Bonham-Carter, with welcoming cheers, introduced him to his "spiritual home"? Discussion on points of principle or policy or interpretation of the attractive slogan "Full Employment" was heard with impatience.

For days before the Assembly anxious busy-bodies besought the Liberal Liberty League to withdraw its Amendment. They were in a grave dilemma. They saw that the Assembly would be faced with a most awkward choice—either to throw Sir William Beveridge overboard by rejecting his "spend to make work" policy (its questionable implications admitted), or to repudiate Land Value Taxation and Free Trade and all the pledges and beliefs in that regard by which the party is most deeply committed. These politically nimble messengers would have it that the demand for Free Trade, at any rate, could be stated in a separate resolution; its clash with the planned economy and protectionism of the "Full Employment" resolution would be concealed; the party would retain Sir William and Free Trade as well; or the Free Traders would be responsible for losing both! But the Liberal Liberty League was determined that the Assembly must decide between two policies so violently in conflict, which road it wished the party to travel, either that which led to liberation from monopoly and special privilege, to the prevention of the misappropriation of the rent of land, to the abolition of tariffs and repressive taxation—or to the State care and domination of individual and industrial life. The "spend to make work" policy is a fallacy and a pernicious fallacy at that. Without vestige of proof or pretence of argument the Assembly accepted it in a confused atmosphere, principles subordinated to politics and candidates sent into the field to speak not for liberalism but for what cannot be distinguished from the authoritarian State. When the Amendment was defeated few of its supporters stayed for the final vote. The immediate contest was over; but that the League now addresses itself to its task with renewed and unflagging vigour let there be no doubt.

Supporting the Amendment, Mr. ASHLEY MITCHELL remarked upon Sir William Beveridge's slight of the Free Traders and Land Value Taxers that they "belonged to the bow and arrow age"; they were so out of date. By comparison, Mr. Mitchell said, the State planners belonged to the stone age. For the Liberal of all parties to come forward with the advocacy of more State control with its inevitable army of officials was not only a paradox; it was political folly. Sir William had made a blunder. He had forgotten the shrewdness of the British jury. With the Socialists in full cry for the bureaucratic State and the Conservative leadership already compromised by the proposals of the present Government for further regimentation, the public were seeking representatives who would offer them "the biggest boot behind bureaucracy." They would say to Liberals who made these proposals: "We don't want you." Lady Bonham-Carter had referred to her father's work for Liberalism but could they imagine Mr. Asquith standing for this policy of reckless finance? MR. ATHOLL ROBERTSON seconding the Amendment inquired about

the facts: had Sir William Beveridge joined the party or had the party joined Sir William Beveridge? MR. W. C. WOODROOFE said he had had enough of planning whether by Communists, Socialists or Sir William, and if he were on a street corner he would say: "I have had a bellyful of planning, enough to last a life time." CAPTAIN J. R. M. SENIOR replied to the perversions of the phrase *laissez faire* that were again trotted out. The English for it was "get out of the way" and he gave livelier versions of it in Welsh and broad Scots, to the landlords it said "go chase yourselves." COMMANDER GEOFFREY BOWLES saw the influence of Mr. E. F. Schumacher, the collaborating economist now at Oxford, who had come from Prussia in 1934, leaving behind the National Socialist totalitarianism he was now advocating for Great Britain; the proposed "man-power" Budget was simply "translated German." Significant were the misgivings expressed by two prominent supporters of the resolution, MR. ELLIOT DODDS saying he had doubts about certain points which it contained and that its proposals challenged some venerable orthodoxies; and MR. RONALD WALKER said that the resolution might make some Free Traders unhappy and cause some uncertainties, but he was prepared to support "this frontal attack on poverty," Lady Bonham-Carter thanking him for this intervention which "must have cost him a good deal to make."

The Assembly proceeded to discard the Rating of Land Values which had been embodied in the Housing Resolution submitted by the Executive in the Preliminary Agenda. The Executive itself substituted, in the Final Agenda, a different resolution of great prolixity which omitted the words of the original resolution "The first essential for such a reform [the taxation and rating of land values] is the valuation of 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 of following the practice successfully applied in Australia and New Zealand; the Liberal party will continue to agitate for this reform." The new resolution stated that: "The acquisition of land must delay neither planning nor building; resultant increases in land values must accrue to the community and not to the private landlord." Then followed the sentence, as in the original resolution, about the difficulties now to be overcome that would have been avoided if the Liberal policy of the taxation and rating of land values had been accepted in the past; the paragraph ending with the declaration that: "If the foregoing is not sufficient, the State must be prepared to take over whatever land is required." These added proposals committed the party to nothing, except that the increased land values "resultant" from public land purchase were to be secured by buying and holding more land that was immediately needed; public land speculation, in fact. On behalf of the Liberal Liberty League, MR. WILFRED HARRISON, seconded by MR. WILLIAM REID, moved the abandonment of the new resolution and its replacement by that which the Executive had originally submitted. The proposition was defeated and the new resolution with its wordy ineptness and amazing exclusion of Land Value Rating from the policy of the party was adopted.

An Amendment by the League to a resolution on the Liberty of the Subject, moved by MR. W. C. WOODROOFE and seconded by MR. S. MARTIN, to provide a preamble "considering that the sphere of State activity and the powers of public authorities have increased, are increasing

and ought to be diminished" was rejected.

At the tail end of the agenda there was a resolution (of a constituency association) reaffirming the Assembly's adherence to the policy of Free Trade for Britain without regard to the trade policies of other countries. An arrangement had been made with others, who had agreed to drop their Free Trade amendment of the "Full Employment" resolution, that facilities would be assured for discussing this separate Free Trade resolution at the final session. But the words we have italicised were negotiated out of the way, and the resolution being adopted with its punch pulled, appeasers and appeased had it both ways. The seal was set on this comedy by the adoption at the same session of a resolution, frankly protectionist in sentiment, for State aid to agriculture. The wheel revolving on

"long-term contracts for all major farm products" was swung full circle one hundred years back to the Corn Law.

The intellectual floundering of a Party once great and clear of purpose makes melancholy reading, but the maze of verbosity to which the bewildered delegates assented is not the end of the story. Many Liberals not represented at the assembly will not be satisfied until a virile policy of libertarian reform is hammered out on the anvil of discussion and presented to that multitude of liberal-minded, but non-political citizens, who could not possibly guess where the Liberal Party stands amid the confusion which at present afflicts all political parties. Such Liberals can effectively use their influence by joining and supporting the Liberal Liberty League, which accepts the challenge of the recent assembly and intends to seize the oppor-

tunity of the controversy which has been aroused. The secretaries and the hon. treasurer earnestly call for that co-operation. Address of the League is: 4, Great Smith Street, London, S.W.1.

The League has printed and circulated copies of the Manifesto which, in 1935, was issued by the Women's Liberal Federation, with its emphatic declaration in favour of Land Value Taxation as the remedy for unemployment. It is an excellent leaflet for distribution; copies may be had, free, on application.

The annual meeting of the League was held in London on February 2. Officers were elected for the ensuing year, reports were received, and plans made for active work. For initiating the campaign in Scotland, a special meeting will be held in Glasgow on March 16, and Edinburgh, March 17.

NOTES AND NEWS

A criticism of the recent report of the Manchester Land Values Committee, which appeared in *Land & Liberty*, has been printed in leaflet form and published by the United Committee and the Manchester League. This, with other literature, has been broadcast in a postal campaign and posted to members of the City Councils of Manchester and Salford and of the large towns nearby. The same postage has been addressed to members of the League and a large number of interested people in this area.

Fixtures of the Yorkshire Land Values League during March include the Rotary Clubs at Otley (Mr. Pryce V. Olver) on the 1st, at Settle on 8th (Mr. Olver) and Brighouse on 23rd (Mr. F. Bentley); and a Public Meeting in Berwick on March 15 on the Problem of Employment, the Land Question and Free Trade, the speakers being Messrs. Ashley Mitchell, P. V. Olver, Wilfrid Harrison and A. W. Madsen. February meetings, in addition to those announced, were the Rotary Clubs at Dewsbury (Mr. Mitchell) and Pontefract (Mr. Bentley). So much interest was aroused at the Holmfirth Rotary that members desire a return meeting from Mr. Bentley.

The economic class at the Yorkshire League's Keighley office has finished its course on *Progress and Poverty* and is now engaged on the study of *Protection or Free Trade*.

A member of the English League who "did a lot of lecturing to Army units last year" in a South Coast town and had just arranged for a new course of six lectures a week for January was told that "the whole thing was cancelled for military reasons," though he could not be told what those reasons were. "If I recollect, I may write to you for more leaflets. I distributed nearly all I had last year and several of the men were quite interested." Another League member, who is "on the move" with the Army of Liberation, writes to Mr. Verinder: "The copies of *Land & Liberty* you sent reached me via five different addresses. Only this evening I found an excellent use for one of them. Having injected a few pertinent observations into a little argument that was going on, I realised that I had an interested audience."

A general meeting of the Liverpool Land Values League was held on February 20, at the Free Church Council Rooms, 50, Lord Street. An earnest appeal was made to members to co-operate in the active work, which is so necessary if we are to persuade thinking men and women to tackle social problems from the only sound basis, which is

the land question. The secretary is pleased to receive from members of the League and H.G. School of Social Science names of tutors for study circles, and those willing to address local meetings.

Members of the West Derby Circle, 4 Zig Zag Road, held on first Wednesday in each month, 7 p.m., and conducted by Miss N. McGovern, continue to make steady progress. Although the course is not yet completed, members testify to the great enlightenment derived from the study of *Progress and Poverty*.

Other classes being held are those at 11, Tudor Road, Crosby, each Tuesday evening, conducted by Mr. C. Paton, and at 48, Kingsway, Waterloo, each Wednesday evening, conducted by Mr. E. Stephens.

We are indebted to Mr. E. J. McManus for the list, with names and addresses, of 177 persons who during the last year or so have obtained *Progress and Poverty* from him. This is the result of a personal canvass and every copy has been bought. No greater service could be rendered than this manner of securing new adherents likely to give much help in advancing the movement.

Councillor A. B. Mackay, Glasgow, has been selected as prospective Labour candidate for the Pollok division, at present represented by the Conservative, Com. T. D. Galbraith. A note in the *Glasgow Evening Times*, February 8, announces a lecture Councillor Mackay was giving on "Housing: Land and Finance" to the Glasgow Fabian Society, and says: "He should be on familiar ground, as he is an active member of the Corporation Housing Department, a lifelong land reformer, and a retired banker rolled into one. For many years Mr. Mackay has been a warm advocate of the policy which aims at deriving public revenue by a levy—national or local—on land values, while repealing taxation on production and exchange, and relieving houses and other buildings and improvements from local rates."

Press clippings bring useful letters to the Press, including J. Brunton McLennan in *Time and Tide*, G. A. Goodwin in *Prestatyn Weekly*, W. H. Simcock in *Tribune*, Chas. H. McGuigan in *Farmers' Journal*, A. H. Weller in *Fleetwood Chronicle*, A. Brown in *Warrington Examiner*, W. Longshaw in *Daily Herald*, V. H. Blundell in *Cavalade*, Joseph Macleod in *Highland News*, "O.S." in *Yorkshire Observer*, and "Tiberius Gracchus" in *Odds and Ends*, an Army journal written by sappers for sappers.

The death of David Catterall on Febru-

ary 8 at the age of 73, resulting from an accident, has deprived the Manchester League of one of its oldest, best informed and most devoted adherents and workers. He was one of the small group of men who founded the League in 1906 and was an active member of the Committee then formed until his death. He was a remarkably well-read man. He diligently searched the writings of British and foreign economists in order to discover defects in Henry George's reasoning that he might have overlooked, but always with the same result: the strengthening of his faith. Though he delighted in debate and courted criticism, his obvious sincerity and modesty won the respect of opponents as well as friends. He would say that it was calm reason that made him a Single Taxer, and would repudiate any suggestion of enthusiasm, but ardent zeal such as his is by others attributed to something softer and more endearing. Mrs. Catterall and her family are assured of the deep and understanding sympathy of her own and her husband's many friends in the movement. (A.H.W.)

ADDRESSES

At 4 Great Smith Street, London S.W.1. Telephone, Abbey 6665: United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values Ltd., W. R. Lester (Treasurer), A. W. Madsen (Secretary), F. C. R. Douglas (Assistant Secretary); Henry George Foundation (Publishing Department); International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade, Ashley Mitchell (Treasurer); English League, Fredk. Verinder (Secretary); Henry George School of Social Science.

Yorkshire League, C. H. Jones and Percy Roberts (Hon. Secretaries), F. Bentley (Organising Secretary), 129 Skipton Road, Keighley; Manchester League, A. H. Weller (Secretary) The Dingle, Chester Road, Hazel Grove, nr. Manchester; Henry George Freedom League, Wm. Reid (Secretary), 9, Woodside Crescent, Glasgow C.3; Welsh League, E. A. Davies (Hon. Sec.) 27 Park Place, Cardiff (Phone 1563) and I. T. Rees (Hon. Organising Sec.) 2 Southey Street, Cardiff; Midland League, John Bush (Pres.); Liverpool League, Miss N. McGovern (Hon. Correspondence Sec.) 74 Osmaston Road, Prenton, Birkenhead; Crosby Henry George Fellowship, C. C. Paton (Hon. Sec.) 11 Tudor Road, Liverpool, 23; Portsmouth League, H. R. Lee (Hon. Sec.) 13 Lawrence Road, Southsea; Derbyshire League, G. Musson (Hon. Sec.) 29 Denby Lane, Codnor; Edinburgh League, A. Davis (Acting Hon. Sec.), 8, Kirkhill Terrace, Edinburgh, 9.