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Toll Gates Stop Home Guard — Liberty and Democracy — Justice and Economic Effects of Land Value Rating — Who should Pay the Cost and How — Speech by E. J. Craigie, M.P. — Making known the Cause of Poverty and the Remedy

## SHALL WE ALWAYS BE POOR NOW?

By H. R. Lee

I TAKE my title from an article appearing in the *Children's Newspaper* of 14th September, in which it is claimed that as a result of the war we are all likely to be poorer; that in fact we have all grown poorer since the last war; that our homeland is not only small in area but lacks many most important materials without an abundant supply of which we could not carry on with our great industries; that we will become a poorer and smaller nation if we cannot get our trade back; that if we can increase our export trade we shall become richer than before; that with Hitlerism driven from the earth, and confidence restored among the nations, we may look forward to a renewal of prosperity and an end to poverty.

These are the conclusions of the article which strangely opens its argument with the fatalistic and thought and action-killing notion laying down an inevitable something else; that history has a thousand examples to remind us that nations, like individuals, pass through periods of growth, prime and decay. If that is true, what does it matter what we do? Trying to answer that question and trying to get any meaning out of the statement as a whole, the mind of the child and of the adult as well is likely to be sore beset.

It is said that nations like individuals are governed by the same laws and must pass through a period of growth, prime and decay; but that history records the decay of thousands of nations does not prove that they *must* decay. Individuals become old and die; from that there is no escape; but nations from their initiation to their decay consist of both young and old during the whole period of their existence. The question is why there is a growth and why the growth should not continue; and what has happened to interfere with that innate desire in human nature which is the law of human progress "the desire to gratify the wants of the animal nature, the wants of the intellectual nature and the wants of the sympathetic nature, the desire to be, to know and to do—desires short of infinity that can never be satisfied as they grow by what they feed on?"

It is said that incomes have decreased since the last war. Surely not the incomes of landowners. Land values everywhere have increased, sometimes a hundredfold. Accordingly it must be the incomes of producers that have decreased. Great estates ruined Italy and it was the inequality springing from this that dried up the strength and vigour of Rome. The barbarism that caused the decay of Rome came not from without but from within, and landlordism will cause the decay of this civilization if it is not suppressed. The great fact we have about our present civilization as we know it,

is the growth of the rent of land with the growth of population and of all the wonderful development in the arts of production. It is by this growth of rent that producers are stripped of their wages; it is by the increase in land values that those who have to work for a living must pay ever higher tribute to the owners of land for permission to live.

There is a fallacy in the statement that if we can increase our export trade we shall become rich. If greater exports are the solution, all we need do is to dump our goods into the ocean. We can only become rich by receiving things, not by parting with them; by receiving and keeping and enjoying the results of our labour, or parting with them only in exchange for the things other people are prepared to provide according to our wants. Domestically, in every household, as to food, clothing, furniture and everything useful for our needs and comforts and joys, the more we are importers "in through the front door" and the less we are exporters parting with our goods, the richer we will be. If this is true of one individual or one family, is it not true of the mass of individuals and of all the families taken together and therefore of the nation as a whole?

The question is of getting and keeping, each of us, the fruits of our labours, free from any exaction or tribute such as landlordism and utterly wrong taxation imposes upon people when they produce what they wish to use or sell and when they wish to buy their needs from others. The answer is to stop this taking of tribute and to abolish this unjust taxation, making provision so that the rent of land will go into the public treasury instead of into private pockets. How to do so is perfectly simple and the principle at stake is absolutely sound and just. It is based upon the fact that the rent of land is never under any circumstances due to what the owner of land has done or can do, but is the result of *all* the people coming together to form villages and towns and cities. There the people discover that one piece of land, or one place of business, or situation for a house or shop or factory, is more valuable than another because more attractive or better situated—*without the owner of the land having any say in the matter*. In one spot, as in the centre of cities, the value or rent of land is very high; in another spot, as in a village or in a back street or in the suburbs, the rent of land is very much less than in a city centre. Some farm land, again, is more valuable than other because it is naturally more fertile, better "endowed by nature" as the saying is, or nearer to a market town. And so on. The rent of land varies according to situation and other natural factors, and it would not exist at all if it were not for the presence and

activities of all the people, taken together. But it does exist and can no more be abolished than you could abolish the differences that there are between one piece of land and another as to the advantage it gives to the person who holds and wishes to use it.

The obvious thing that everyone ought to see is that no individual should have the right to pocket the rent of land or be able to say "unless you pay me such and such a price for my land you will not be allowed to use it at all." The rent of land is in fact public property and we should make it so by simply taxing the value which the land has (apart from any buildings upon it), obliging in fact every landowner to pay rent for it to the people as a whole. In that way our Parliament would get its revenues to pay for the cost of government and our villages and towns and cities would also get their revenues in that way to meet the expenses they incur in looking after the welfare of the people who dwell in them. We could then have a real free trade—no taxes on producers or consumers—with all its blessings to make good things cheap and abundant; and above all it would profit no one to hold land out of use in the attempt to force others to pay more for it than it was worth under perfectly free conditions.

## WREN'S PLANS AFTER THE GREAT FIRE

IN AN article in the *Manchester Guardian*, 7th September, 1940, Mr Ivor Brown uses the centenary of the Great Fire of London, 6th September, 1666, to moralize upon the opportunities of rebuilding the city on spacious and well-planned lines, opportunities lost because of the obstacles placed in the way, and he would draw lessons for the present day:

"Both Evelyn and Wren were making plans for a new city while the ruins smouldered. Evelyn sent his scheme to the King by the thirteenth of the month; Wren had been even more prompt. That these noble dreams for a drastic rebuilding were never realized owing to civic jealousies and smallness of view is a lamentable fact. What a merchants' quarter London might have had with Wren's 'two great streets, ninety feet wide, which would have converged to St Paul's, one leading into two piazzas on the way'! Both men would have amply developed the quays and the river frontage from the Tower to Blackfriars. But it was not to be. So Wren was confined to his Cathedral and his Churches, and most exquisite was that ecclesiastical achievement. But the City as a whole was left once more to grow up anyhow, renewing the narrow lanes which were the Tudor conception of a street and losing the spaciousness which was the essence of Wren's new and large ideas. . . . Had Wren been listened to in 1666 the City of London, instead of being a modern huddle of ancient alleyways, would have crowned a Roman stature with an Attic grace and yet been wholly English in its noble amplitude. They would not listen to the master-builder then. Will they give ear to-morrow, when the great issue of patching or planning has to be decided?"

"Civic jealousies and smallness of view," Mr Ivor Brown says, were the reasons why these noble dreams were never realized. This is throwing the blame on the City Corporation when the historic fact is that land monopoly was responsible and land prices rocketed in anticipation of the rebuilding after the fire. The City would have proceeded with the plans but for the obstinacy of the landowners each hanging on grimly to his bit of privilege and demanding such prices in compensation for the necessary land to plan and widen streets that the cost was too great to contemplate. We think Mr Brown himself must be well aware that before anything can be done to-day, the issue of the people *versus* the land monopoly will have to be settled. How else can our city authorities and our municipalities listen to and

Finally, it is said that Hitlerism has to be driven from the earth in order to put an end to poverty. But Hitlerism is the product and not the cause of poverty. It was industrial unrest and distress in Germany itself that gave rise to Hitlerism and caused it to flourish like a rank weed. And when Hitlerism is driven "from the earth" poverty will still remain unless we remove the landlordism from which we have suffered long before Hitler or Hitlerism was heard of.

The *Children's Newspaper* says the chief problem before us is to get our trade back. That is extremely desirable but we must remember that before there can be any commerce there must be the production of the things with which to trade and exchange. Therefore to set the wheels of trade revolving we must first free production. The means is to hand, and I would say the only effective and sufficient means, by taxing land values and abolishing the taxes and tariffs which stop the individual producers in the different countries from freely exchanging their goods. This we can do now if we have the will, not waiting upon other nations or until the war is ended; that may be too late. Let these things be considered and say whether these proposals would not be for the benefit of everyone. Civilization based upon justice will never decay.

give ear to our modern master builders who if only they had the chance are ready to emulate anything that Wren conceived for his beloved London?

Maybe Mr Brown was writing without his book and had not looked up the records. So we give him this extract from the Diary of Samuel Pepys, 3rd December, 1667, to have ready for his next essay on the subject:—

"He (Sir Richard Ford) tells me, also, speaking of the new street that is to be made from the Guild Hall down to Cheapside, that the ground is already, most of it, bought. And tells me of one particular, of a man that hath a piece of ground lying in the very middle of the street that must be: which, when the street is cut out of it, there will remain ground enough, of each side, to build a house to front the street. He demanded £700, for the ground, and to be excused paying anything for the melioration of the rest of his ground that he was to keep. The Court consented to give him £700, only not to abate him the consideration: which the man denied; but told them, and so they agreed, that he would excuse the City the £700 that he might have the benefit of the melioration without paying anything for it. So much some will get by having the City burned: Ground, by this means, that was not worth 4d. a foot before, will now, when houses are built, be worth 15s. a foot. But he tells me of the common standard now reckoned on between man and man, in places where there is no alteration of circumstances, but only the houses burnt, there the ground, which, with a house on it, did yield £100 a year, is now reputed worth £33 6s. 3d.: and that this is the common market price between one man and another made upon a good and moderate medium."

Wise old Samuel Pepys. He at any rate knew what "site values" were and how they arose.

It seems to me that the fundamental trouble from which we are suffering is a social and economic maladjustment all over Europe, and that our primary task when we have won the war will be to get this maladjustment right. If I am lukewarm about Mr Woolf's speculations, it is because I feel that he is dealing throughout with symptoms and not with causes. His political machinery will not help us if we cannot solve our economic problem. If we can, we shall find that, in doing so, we have developed some quite different political framework.—E. H. Carr in a review, *Sunday Times*, 1st September, of Leonard Woolf's *The War for Peace*, Routledge.