

A COMPLIMENT AND AN APPEAL

The decision of the London County Council condemning the law they have to operate, the law which in effect protects and endows the land monopoly and at the same time taxes all houses and other buildings, is of the highest significance. The Council have exposed the results of the present system and proved its inequity. It is the cause of high rents and housing congestion. It stands in the way of every kind of enterprise. It creates and maintains conditions under which public authorities are faced with difficulties sometimes insuperable in providing the public with its needs in the way of wider streets, better roads, open spaces, schools and playgrounds, and services of every description.

The Finance Committee appointed to investigate the whole matter declared in favour of land value rating and recommended that Parliament should enact the necessary legislation. The Report of the Committee has been adopted. London thus lends its influence and powerful stimulus to the municipal agitation for this policy, approved in resolutions adopted by more than 230 local authorities in recent years. The Report is a public document belonging to the literature which, given adequate circulation, is one effective means of educating and persuading town councillors and ratepayers everywhere whose minds are ripe for an argument that is unanswerable.

If it is too much to hope that the present Government, constituted as it is, will do anything about it, what then is the next step, one may ask? The next step is to maintain the agitation with vigour and to avail ourselves of this ready opportunity to instil the principles of land value taxation, relating them as they can so convincingly be related to the universal grievance against high rents, against high rates and against the scandal of monopoly prices for land whenever it is wanted for new development.

The Report, year 1935, of the United Committee described the work being done in that direction, apart from and in addition to other activities. To have that work certified by the agencies that are organized to thwart it is testimony with which our supporters should be acquainted. I ask for no better exhortation to them to continue in well-doing, and to subscribe if they can the financial assistance which I assure them is most urgently needed, that we may shoulder our duties and responsibilities in the conduct of the campaign.

I ask counter response to the appeal that the Land Union, apprehensive of the success of our efforts, is making to its clientèle, the massed battalions of wealth and privilege whose interests are said to be menaced. The Land Union, the national organization "to protect the interests of owners and other investors in agricultural land and real property generally," its President the Marquess of Exeter, its Chairman, Lord Dynevor and its impressive list of 67 Council Members and Vice-Presidents including 21 Members of the House of Lords, pays this compliment and utters this warning in its *Journal* for July and in the Annual Report it has just issued:—

A Change in Rating

A campaign to bring about a change in the methods for assessing to rates land and house property is being waged with great intensity.

The enthusiastic supporters of this campaign argue with much vehemence, and with an airy disregard of the true position, that if rates were levied only upon "sites," great benefit would accrue to those who occupy buildings, for they would be relieved from the present burden of rates at the expense of the landlord.

Books have been published—we review one in our present

issue*—meetings have been held, and resolutions passed by various local authorities advocating this reform and speeches are being made throughout the country, which are listened to with considerable attention, for naturally everyone is anxious to know of some new remedy which would relieve them from the heavy payments they have to-day to make on account of rates, and the new system would result, they are told, in cheaper residences for all.

We warn our readers that the real object of this campaign, which is rather cleverly disguised, is another attempt to carry into law the policy of Mr Henry George, and we make no apology for again calling attention to that policy and what, briefly stated, it means.

The Taxation and Rating of Land Values

In our last Report we called attention to the fact that the Land Value Tax, introduced by Lord Snowden when Chancellor of the Exchequer, had been repealed, but we pointed out that it was certain that the agitation for the taxation or rating of site values would be pressed with great vigour. In this assumption we were correct, for much propaganda is being carried on, with a view to imposing a special tax or rate upon site value.

A resolution, originally passed by the Cardiff Corporation, has been discussed by many local authorities, and a large number have decided to press for the introduction of a scheme which will enable rates to be levied on the owners of sites, whether built on or not.

The Land Union has been able to supply members of these authorities, who were opposed to this alteration in rating, with briefs setting out the arguments against the system. . . . It is with great satisfaction we record that owing to the efforts of these members in certain districts, the resolution framed at Cardiff has been lost.

We would, however, point out that the agitation is being carried on with great force, books and pamphlets on the subject are being published and circulated, and we are fully aware of the fact that attempts will be made at the earliest opportunity to obtain legislation to bring about this alteration of the rating law.

We appeal to all owners and investors in land, whether built on or not, to support the Land Union, and they may rest assured that the Council will take whatever steps may be possible to prevent any such change in the present system of rating, which must act in a very detrimental manner to one of the finest securities in this country upon which capital is advanced.

The statement of the policy attributed to Henry George, though not unfair, is crude in the inference, drawn from a supposed instance, that under land value taxation "outgoings would be greater than rent received." Another occasion may be used to print the statement and criticize it. That by the way. The important thing is the recognition of the effectiveness of the campaign we have conducted, of the literature we have published and circulated, of the advice and information we have been able to give by circular and interview to the parties concerned. Not our puny equipment, which we could not hope to match against the unlimited financial resources of the landed interest, has succeeded thus far. Rather it is the power of truth allowed expression in the company of error. Let the Land Union provide its briefs for the spokesmen of the existing order. But let us also have adequate chance to state our case and make it known. The public will judge. There cannot and must not be any faltering at this stage. It is as treasurer of the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values and in association with my co-treasurer, Mr C. E. Crompton, that I address this appeal very earnestly to all the readers of *Land & Liberty*.

W. R. LESTER.

* Mr Douglas's book *Land-Value Rating*.