

LAND VALUES.

Fifteenth Year.

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"OUR POLICY."

"We would simply take for the community what belongs to the community—the value that attaches to land by the growth of the community; leave sacred to the individual all that belongs to the individual."—Henry George.

UNEMPLOYMENT.

It seems extraordinary how slow people are to recognise the cause of their troubles and how easy it has always been to switch them off on false issues. Many are the adepts at this process, though Tariff "Reformers" easily take the lead. They are pastmasters in the art of making the most of our troubles and then suggesting that taxes on everything (excepting, of course, monopoly) will put matters straight. What wicked Radical, Socialist or Single Tax journal could paint the condition of England in blacker colours than the following? Yet the picture is presented in the leading columns of a great London journal, the defender of every privilege, every monopoly, and every vested interest now battening on the life blood of the people. Here are the words of the Protectionist organ:—

"The real meaning of the sullen discontent which is rising like a tide throughout the country is that the essential disease from which England has been suffering for years is coming to a head. That disease is poverty due to unemployment. . . . Municipalities all over the country will allocate large sums of public money to be expended in executing work which is not required by means of employing men incapable of rightly performing it. The charitable will be heavily fined in order to support women and children, and especially the loafer, who finds a golden chance in times of distress. There will be a recrudescence of disturbances and there may be riots, and in the end the state of things will be a good deal worse than it is now, while the community will be sensibly poorer. . . . The working men of England find it desperately hard to make a living, and a large number of them cannot earn any money at all."

Observe, not a word of those monopolies and special privileges which the journal exists to defend and which it can easily be shown are the direct causes of the distress described. On the contrary, the misery itself is used as a peg on which to hang an appeal, not for the abolition of these abuses, but for the creating of yet another—the taxation of things which the people consume, and therefore the putting of them more than ever out of reach. How employment can be extended by making the products of labour artificially dearer and therefore more difficult to get there is not a word to explain.

When, however, they assume the offensive and

criticise the party in power for their lack of any constructive policy which will effectually deal with poverty and unemployment, they are on much surer ground. What, they ask, have the Liberal Party done during their tenure of office to deal with unemployment? And the answer gleefully comes:

"Absolutely nothing of the slightest enduring value."

A thousand pities that the party of progress should lay itself open to the taunt, but after every Liberal proposal is examined, including those recently advanced by the Prime Minister, it must reluctantly be allowed there is truth in the charge. Even the very latest official proposals do not get beyond the ancient idea of grants from the Exchequer in aid of relief works for the unemployed. That there is the honest desire to do something which will last we have not the remotest doubt. Why, then, this too obviously temporary plan of dealing with symptoms whose cause lies deep?

It is, of course, true that grants from the National or Local Exchequers in payment of wages to men who are to-day out of work will be of immediate advantage to those particular men. But is it not also true that so long as we raise our national and local revenues by taxing industry and earnings, this only means the diversion of the necessary sum through rates and taxes from productive industry and therefore means lessened employment from industry in general? The conclusion is indisputable. Reduce by taxation the consuming power of workers in general, as will be done under this plan, and it is absolutely certain that some among them will lose their jobs to the very extent that others now out of work find jobs through getting their wages paid by the proceeds of the tax. Our system of taxation bears too heavily on industry already, and is one of the two prime causes of unemployment. We cannot provide more employment by increasing this burden.

Such juggling only means that so long as the manufacturer, merchant, shopkeeper and wage-earner is called on to provide the money, some people will lose jobs in order that others now out of work may gain them. The Municipality or other public body, as the case may be, certainly becomes a larger employer of labour than it was, but the *sum of employment* throughout the country must remain as it was before the money was raised. Employment is diverted, not increased.

Nor can the expediting of public works afford any permanent relief. A Government cannot for ever be hastening on the construction of docks, or towns for ever be borrowing money for works whose time has not yet come. At best the pushing on of works means that men get work to-day which in the natural course of events they would have got to-morrow; but what they get to-day they lose to-morrow.

We trust we are not hypercritical in also drawing attention to the danger of reaction which always accompanies the increase of taxation when levied on its present basis. Tax the public in order to raise money for park improvements, open-air swimming baths, resetting drains, laying out recreation grounds, or anything else, and no sooner do they feel the pinch of the rates than they begin to resent it and very effectively express their resentment at the polling booth. This is a fact we have to face whether we like it or not. Before long the Progressives who favour this expenditure of the ratepayers' money are swept from power and the reactionary party pledged to inactivity and reduction of the rates takes its place. Thus is the last state worse than the first. Time and again London and other large towns have experienced the process. In Glasgow the proposal to spend three-quarters of a million on workmen's dwellings led to the fall of one of the ablest Lord Provosts the City has yet seen.

All this reaction and stagnation simply because, however desirable in themselves the works may be, the common workman and trader sees his income reduced through the added rates and revolts at what he very rightly considers the imposition. Everywhere most needful works are hung up for this reason.

Everywhere the money question blocks the way, though were we to connect cause with effect another tale would be to tell. Did we realise that each and all of these improvements means added value to the sites or country affected, and, acting on this knowledge, were we to take this value in payment of the public improvements which create it we would be driven to tax neither the wage of the workman nor profit of the trader. Works of public utility would not then be brought to a stand, and reaction would no longer alternate with progress. We notice that the people of Glasgow have at present before them the proposal to erect a costly pumping plant for supplying water to certain high-lying quarters of the City which are now without an adequate water supply. As usual, the scheme has met with opposition on the score of expense. But it has also been pointed out that the new water supply would make the land affected suitable for building, and therefore enrich the landowners. On the strength of this fact, the City Treasurer is moving in the Council that the cost of the works be a charge on the landowners, otherwise he will oppose the scheme. That is the proper course of action, and we congratulate the City Treasurer on the step he has taken.

Were such a course to be generally followed so as to tap this fund which public works themselves give rise to throughout the country, at the same time removing the

burden of rates from the industrious population, there can be no question whatever that works of public utility would not meet with the opposition they now so often encounter from the taxpayers. Such works might then be enormously extended, and new sources of employment would everywhere open out to labour.

But in our wisdom we take the opposite course. We allow the riches created by the expenditure of the taxpayers' money to drain into private purses, and then attempt to make good the deficiency by piling the burden on trade and industry. Result: work is scarce and unemployment chronic. We have at our doors a source of revenue which, without punishing trade, might provide funds sufficient to employ every genuine "out of work" throughout the country. Meanwhile we daily allow this splendid fund to slip by, and land which by the taxpayers' money is made worth thousands of pounds, is only asked to contribute as many pence to the public treasury.

Here we have the simple and complete answer to the Tariff Reformers' challenge. It counters their every attack, and carries the way right into their own special reserve. They claim to be able to give more work by taxing the goods the people need. We reply by demanding the abolition of such taxes on industry as already exist and the widening of the field of employment by opening opportunities to labour, through a tax on land in proportion to its worth whether now withheld from use or not. They never tire of protesting that they alone have a remedy which deals permanently with unemployment and the danger is that if people are not disabused they will end by believing them. Let the friends of true reform show them their mistake.

It is with satisfaction we note that Mr. Asquith in outlining his plans for expedited loans to local authorities, Naval expenditure, increased Post Office Staff, and doubling the Central Fund, clearly stated that they are only intended to deal with the present emergency without prejudice to the ultimate policy of the Government. He declared that these remedies for the coming winter are at best but palliatives, and that the Government intends to strike at the heart of the trouble before this Parliament separates.

Where, we ask, can that heart lie if not in unjust laws which interfere with labour's access to land, and unjust taxes which crush industry? We are entitled to expect that in the best interests of all, the Government will face the real cause of unemployment and submit to Parliament the real remedy.

Work is impossible without access, direct or indirect, to the earth. It follows, then, that if by unwise class legislation we make such access, for the common man, sometimes difficult, sometimes altogether impossible,

we at once have the makings of an unemployed class. All these so-called remedies—Municipal work, State Insurance against unemployment, Protection against the foreigner—proceed just as if there were no such thing as a land question; just as if the relationship of man to the earth had nothing at all to do with the amount of work available. They simply ignore the root question, and are therefore futile. They seek to alleviate distress while leaving the cause of distress in full operation.

On the other hand, throw open the land of our country by reforming the system of taxation which offers a bounty on unused or imperfectly used land, and such an anomaly as idle men and idle land is altogether unthinkable.

So, in spite of every assurance that this question of unemployment is a very complex one and must be carefully approached from many sides, we shall continue to insist that both cause and remedy are quite simple.

This system of burdening the land user with taxation for the benefit of the land speculator is the way we now "encourage" unemployment. The ingenuity of man would be hard put to it to devise a better plan for making work scarce. Nothing we can do could be more hostile to employment. We affirm that an easement of the pressure by increasing the number of opportunities for employment is the only radical way of dealing with this question, and an adequate tax on land values is the simple means by which this easement can be brought about.

W. R. LESTER.

VALUATIONS AND PRICES.

A Record.

The following questions and answers are taken from the current volumes of the Parliamentary Debates, and we quote them in full partly because the case seems to constitute a record disparity, and partly as showing the step-by-step method by which such information is elicited.

"Mr. DUNDAS WHITE (Dumbartonshire): To ask the Secretary to the Admiralty, what are the areas of land and foreshore, respectively, of the property near Greenock, recently purchased by the Admiralty for purposes in connection with the Loch Long torpedo range; when and from whom that property was purchased; what was the price paid; and whether the purchase was effected under compulsory powers."

(Answered by Mr. EDMUND ROBERTSON): "The area acquired is 10 acres of land, 4½ acres of foreshore. This property is being purchased from Sir M. H. Shaw-Stewart, Baronet. The purchase has not yet been formally completed, but the Admiralty are in possession of the property. The price to be paid is £27,225; the Admiralty will also pay costs. A 'notice to treat,' under the Defence Act, was served with a view to compulsory purchase, but the price was subsequently settled by agreement." (10th February, 1908.)

This was followed on the 21st of February, by the following question and answer:—

"Mr. DUNDAS WHITE (Dumbartonshire): To ask the Secretary for Scotland, what was taken as the annual value for rating of the 10 acres of land and 4½ acres of foreshore near Greenock, purchased recently by the Admiralty for £27,225, at the time of that purchase."

(Answered by Mr. SINCLAIR): "I am informed that the land referred to formed part of a subject entered in the assessor's roll of the annual value of £75, and which was about 48 acres in area. No entry was made in the roll in respect of the foreshore."

Further information, however, was wanted, and on the 12th November, after sufficient time had elapsed to have the valuations developed, the previous questions and answers were followed by this:—

"Mr. DUNDAS WHITE (Dumbartonshire): To ask the Secretary for Scotland, with reference to the property of 10 acres of land and 4½ acres of foreshore near Greenock, which was recently purchased by the Admiralty for torpedo purposes for £27,225, and which at the time of that purchase formed part of a property of 48 acres of land (with foreshore not entered on the valuation roll) which was entered on the valuation roll as of the annual value of £75, if he can now say by how much that £75 valuation for rating of the larger property has been reduced by reason of the severance of the purchased portion." (10th November, 1908.)

(Answered by Mr. SINCLAIR): "By £11 2s." (12th November, 1908.)

Thus it will be seen that the nation paid £27,225 for a property which had, for rating purposes, a value attributed to it of £11 2s., on which amount £27,225 represents 2,452 years' purchase. This, we believe, constitutes a record in disparity between valuations for rating and valuations for purchase. No one would suggest that the price was too high; but the valuation was far too low. There will be some surprises when market value is adopted as the standard of rating.

Incidentally, it may be observed that Greenock is one of the most overcrowded towns in Scotland. Of its 68,000 inhabitants, more than 36,000 live more than two in a room, of these more than 19,000 live more than three in a room, and of these more than 7,000 live more than four in a room.—(Housing Conditions, Scotland, Return C.4016, 1908.)

On 16th November the following information was elicited in the House of Commons:—

A Cathcart Board School Site.

Mr. DUNDAS WHITE asked the Secretary for Scotland if he will say what was the area of the ground recently purchased by the Cathcart School Board at Holmlea Road, Cathcart Bridge, as a site for a public school; what was the date of the purchase; what was the price paid for it; and what was taken at the time of the purchase as its annual value for rating, or, if it formed part of a larger subject, has that been reduced by reason of the severance of the purchased portion.

Mr. SINCLAIR: I am informed that the area of the site in question is 6,886 square yards, and that the purchase was completed in April, 1908, the net price paid being £3,270 17s. The site formed part of a larger subject, which was let at a rent of £2 9s. 10d. an acre, and I understand the rent has been reduced pro rata in consequence of the sale.

"Man did not make the earth, and though he had a natural right to occupy it, he had no right to locate as his property in perpetuity any part of it; neither did the Creator of the earth open a land office from whence title deeds should issue."—Thomas Paine, 1795.