

An Uncompromising Warrior

In our last issue we briefly reported the death of Ashley Mitchell on January 12th aged ninety.



A "fallen political warrior" was how Ashley Mitchell described himself in his memoirs published by LAND & LIBERTY PRESS a year or so ago. He meant by that his failure to gain a seat in Parliament on the many occasions he stood as a Liberal candidate. His defeats, however, did him more credit than victory did many others because of his refusal to trim his sails to prevailing winds where this meant compromising his principles.

He was a traditional Liberal of the old school and scorned expediency as a substitute for sound economic principles and he believed passionately in the policies of free trade, the taxation of land values, individual freedom and a stable currency. To him, these were not merely ideals, but just and practical policies, easier to administer than the numerous palliatives which masquerade as social reform. And he was right.

Ashley Mitchell, a Yorkshireman and proud of it, was also an internationalist. He had travelled widely and over many years earned the very high regard and affection of all with whom he did business and with whom he collaborated in furthering the econo-

mics and philosophy of Henry George.

He was a member of the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values for fifty-four years. During this time, for most of which he was a member of the executive committee, he contributed much wisdom, energy and experience, never failing to increase his financial contributions when circumstances called for it.

The international side of the movement was of particular importance to him and he attended the conferences of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade from the beginning right to the most recent, which was held in the Isle of Man in 1973 where he was re-elected President.

Born in 1886 at Ossett, Yorkshire, Ashley Mitchell's political career started early and like his father and grandfather he attached himself to the Liberal Party. He became secretary of the local Junior Liberal Association at twenty. He was soon to be in the thick of political activity when the hotly debated land taxes were first presented in the Budget of 1909. The Land Value Duties of this period were derisory and bore little resemblance to land-value taxation as properly understood, but in so far as they provided for the first time a valuation of land apart from buildings and improvements, the foot was in the door so to speak.

Ashley Mitchell's first wife whom he married in 1912 died in 1921. This was a great blow to him. Thereafter, he channelled his time and energies into his work and politics.

He first stood as a parliamentary candidate in 1923 in a straight fight with a Conservative in the Scarborough and Whitby division where he addressed seventy-five meetings. The result was close with the Conservatives obtaining 15,927 votes and the Liberals 14,933.

By this time he had seen two years war service and was engaged with his two brothers in the worsted manufacturing business.

After further political fights—at Scarborough again in what had become a three-cornered contest and in Penistone, a socialist stronghold—Ashley Mitchell was invited to stand at Dundee. He tells the story in his book:

"I was approached from Dundee, where my name

A HECKLER SILENCED

I accepted an invitation to speak at an open-air meeting in Pontefract. At the end of the meeting the chairman asked for questions. One man in the front of the audience asked a question which I answered—I don't remember what it was. The chairman said, "Any more questions." No more were forthcoming so we got down from the wagon and proceeded up the street to the Liberal rooms.

As we were walking along I caught up with the election agent and I said, "Where was your Communist to-night?" adding, "There was only one question." "That was the Communist," she said. "Well", I said, "he wasn't very troublesome." "No", said the agent, "I went to him and asked if he was off form to-night." "Form be blown", he replied, "if all Liberals were like that chap, there never would have been any communists."

—Ashley Mitchell

had been sent by Lord Stanmore who had been placing the candidates. Dundee at that time was a two-membered constituency. The Conservatives were nominating one and the Liberals had to nominate the other—with mutual support. I had the President of the Dundee Liberal Association on the telephone, urging me to come as they knew me well from Liberal Conferences. But I told him that I was not prepared to accept tariffs on any account: I considered them evil and I was not prepared to palter with them. He pressed me, but I told him that I was not going into Parliament a tied man—if I went, I was going to be free. Another Liberal was secured, Dingle Foot, and he was elected. Then, when he was defeated some years later, he joined the Labour Party. That was the only time when I had a twinge of regret that I hadn't kept him out."

Ashley Mitchell married again in 1934 and subsequently stood at Halifax and Batley. And after he thought his election campaign days were over, he was "recalled" to fight Keighley in 1955. Although always beaten, he never lost a deposit, even when Liberals were losing them wholesale. He attributed this to the fact that he proclaimed his faith in free trade and the abolition of land monopoly.

The "fallen political warrior" never lost his interest or enthusiasm for the reforms he knew were right and up to his last days he was in regular contact with the London office of the United Committee.

The business affairs, politics and ideals that formed the mainstream of his life were serious matters to him, but when pressures were relaxed his almost impish humour came to the surface and bubbled over.

He had a tale for every occasion and he always delighted his audience, whether public or private, when the humourist in him took over.

This is how he will be remembered by many; but by everyone he will be remembered as one of those rare figures in public life—an honest politician who refused to compromise his principles.

The United Committee and International Union were represented at his funeral by V. H. Blundell.

He leaves a daughter, Rhoda Field, by his second wife.

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LIBERAL POLICIES FOR LIBERALS

If only the Liberal leaders of today could realise that the liberty of the individual and real social justice are wholly compatible and indivisible, they would turn away from the semi-socialist policies of the state-planned economy to the really radical policies of Henry George, whose proposals go far deeper than the mere establishment of a new source of government revenue.

—Ashley Mitchell

Hunger or Scarcity

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"Fighting starvation in the Third World is of limited

I well remember Cary Grant, as the tycoon about to give a United Nations lecture in the film "That Touch of Mink", asking Doris Day, a humble typist, for her views on the problem of the under-developed countries. "I think they ought to be developed", she replied hopefully. "You", replied Grant, "have put into one sentence the content of my whole sixty-minute talk."

Judging by the revelations in a new book*, the delightfully simplistic philosophy of Miss Day's typist summed up, not only the faith of Mr. Grant's tycoon but the whole guiding strategy of the United Nations, the World Bank and all those western nations offering food aid programmes to the Third World. "Countries needing development? Right," seems to be the line, "let's go get 'em developed."

But according to Susan George, "development" as applied by the West to the recipients of their patronage, has been a password for imposing a new kind of dependency; a policy for enriching the already rich world and for shaping other societies to meet their own commercial and political needs. And in the process the poor have stayed poor, the hungry have stayed hungry, and exploitation and misery have marched on in their ten-league boots.

Yet, as Mrs. George explains, it is wrong to think in terms of "hungry countries". There are no hungry countries. There are only, in every country, poor people who have neither the facilities to grow enough nor the means to buy enough food to live on. But whereas in the USA, for example, poverty so extreme as to mean hunger only touches a fraction of the people, in under-developed countries it is likely to involve half the population.

Who or what is responsible for the world deficiency of food? Is it the pressure of population or, as the popular cliché has it, too many mouths to feed? Certainly not, asserts Mrs. George, undeterred by the fact that world population is increasing by over 70 million (two per cent) a year and will double itself in thirty-two years if the trend continues. As she sees it, neither a high rate of food production nor a thinness of population can guarantee that hunger will be overcome. Famine exists in Bolivia with five inhabitants per square mile and in India with 172; but there is no famine in Holland where there are 326. In Bolivia there is 0.63 of a hectare of cul-

**How the Other Half Dies* by Susan George, Penguin Books, 1976, £1.