

LAND & LIBERTY

Editor

Asst. Editor

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TWO SHILLINGS

Land—Palliatives and Principles	147	Editorial
News and Comment	149	
Why Land Tax Exemptions are Unsound	151	Robert Tideman
The Land Price Spiral	153	P. R. Hudson
Parliament and Revenues	154	A. J. Carter
Picking a Cure for the Land Problem	156	John Spencer
Protecting the Consumer	157	A. J. C.
The Conference Papers - II	158	
Letters to the Editor	162	
Miscellany	163	



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EDITORIAL

Land—Palliatives and Principles

TODAY the land question is in the forefront of the public mind. It has played a big part in the propaganda of all parties during the election. The phrase "community created land values belong to the community" has been bandied about not only by the Labour Party, but also by some Conservatives. The Liberals reaffirmed their policy of site-value rating, a number of candidates giving it prominence in their election addresses. The need for land reform has forced itself upon the attention of professional people, particularly in the sphere of town planning and rating, and the whole country is aware as never before since the war that land plays a vital part in our economy and that it impinges upon every aspect of our lives, our homes, industry, roads, schools, trade and leisure.

But the history of attempts to reform the land tenure system in Britain over the last sixty years is a story of determined resistance by the landed interests to any encroachment upon what they regard as their rightful preserves — the rent of land.

It is understandable that land holders will make every attempt to defend their "rights." The enjoyment of a privilege held at the expense of the community at large will not be lightly surrendered. But our case is a moral one. It rests upon the undeniable principle that every individual who comes into the world is entitled to share on equal terms with his neighbour the resources that nature has provided — resources that are summed up by economists in the one word "land."

Man comes into the world only with his labour and his natural talents. To produce his sustenance, to live, work and play, his natural abilities must directly or indirectly be exercised upon land. There is no escape from this fundamental truth, no matter how much it may be obscured by talk of "modern con-

ditions," "growth," "wages policies," "Welfare Statism," etc.

The diehard defenders of the *status quo* have never relaxed. Misrepresentation and distortion have been their weapons. But they have been aided by the legislative incompetence, compromise and the economic ignorance of those to whom land reform was entrusted.

Ever since Lloyd George introduced his Land Value Duties — a travesty of land-value taxation — a web of economic fallacies has been woven around every argument concerned with attempts to collect the rent of land. Many of these economic fallacies have now been blown sky high by the Whitstable Survey and a great deal of ground has been cleared.

What now remains to be emphasised is that the land problem is not a mere question of the high price of land treated in isolation; it is not simply a question of betterment or planning permissions, of windfalls and of speculation. Neither are the remedies to be found in capital gains taxes, land commissions, development charges, low interest rates, land price control or any of the nostrums that fly in the face of the laws of economics as well as of the principles of justice.

To listen to the speeches prior to the election and to read the newspapers and political weeklies that have devoted space to discussions on land, one would think that to recoup the difference between the present value of land and its value when development permission has been given is all that is required to end the evils of land monopoly. But this is not even a half measure — it is a quarter measure. As far back as the time of John Stuart Mill an increment tax was regarded by true land reformers as being far and away short of our needs. Yet these betterment taxes today, whatever their shape or form, are not even true increment taxes, since they capture not all increases in land value, as true increment taxes do, but only increments that accrue to land coming up for development.

If we ask ourselves why it is that political interest does not appear to go beyond the collection of betterment value, or part of it, we must answer that land reform today is proposed from the wrong motives — although these motives are not themselves bad. Few people are aware of the need for land reform until it is forced upon them by prevailing conditions, and even then only where there appears to be a discernible connection between land and immediate social problems. That land monopoly is at the root of other ills in society escapes them.

Land speculation, the high price of land, rent control, unemployment, inadequate planning, road and traffic problems, all stem from a fundamental flaw in our land tenure system. These problems arise because equal rights to land have not been acknowledged. If we deal with any of these conditions in isolation, we deal with only one facet of a much larger problem. If, on the other hand, the approach is made from the standpoint of social justice, no special means will be necessary to deal with these problems, for they simply would not arise.

Last month saw the end of one government and the beginning of another. How long this government will last we cannot say, but to the extent that Labour has a majority, it is certain that Parliament will open in an atmosphere of uncertainty as to the future, and there will be alarm and despondency among those who remember Labour's disastrous development charges of the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act with which their latest plan has much in common.

Labour's Land Commission is not only a timid approach to land monopoly, barely touching the fringe of the problem; it lacks any guiding economic principle. Nothing can be said for the discriminate treatment of land holders who happen to come within the net of Labour's plan. We predict that its implementation will meet with the same fate as the earlier development charges and for the same reasons.

Within twelve months anything could happen. If there should be re-thinking on the whole question of land reform there can be no doubt about the direction it should take. We have been encouraged by the growing interest in, and acceptance of, the policies we have so constantly advocated. We must see that this grows as the weeks pass.

Fishermen's Petition

To the Editor of *The Times*

SIR,—We Mevagissey fishermen are being deprived of our livelihood by the dumping in this country of cheap South African pilchards, and would appreciate an investigation by the industrial co-operative societies, the large majority of whose members are working people like ourselves, into the C.W.S.'s buying policies, which include the purchase of South African pilchards to the virtual exclusion of the home produced commodity. This request is supported by all inshore fishermen in the traditional Cornish pilchard fishing ports, where the industry is threatened with extinction.

Since 1955, when South Africa started sending large consignments of pilchards to the U.K., five canneries drawing supplies from Cornwall have ceased production, and some thirty fishing boats have been laid up or sold.

We therefore not only ask for an enquiry into the buying policy of the huge C.W.S., but would also plead that home-caught pilchards be given preference over pilchards imported from countries enjoying Imperial Preference benefits and where coloured workers are underpaid and under-privileged.

If this traditional pilchard fishing industry is allowed to die, surely fifty million Englishmen will want to know the reason why.

B. H. HUNKEN,

Secretary, Mevagissey Fishermen's Society.