

## REGIONAL CONFERENCE

## The Land Value Policy at Heanor

On Saturday, 8th November, there assembled in the Town Hall, Heanor, 293 delegates from 73 councils, societies and organizations at a Regional Conference to Promote the Taxation and Rating of Land Values. The Conference was convened by the United Committee with the able assistance of Councillor L. Shipley. In attendance, as well as in the keen interest taken throughout, it was a remarkable success. The delegates and visitors present took up the full seating capacity of the Hall. The proceedings, which occupied an afternoon and an evening session, lasted from 3 till 9.30 o'clock.

The delegates and visitors received an official welcome from the Chairman of the Heanor Urban District Council, Councillor J. T. Smith, J.P., who expressed his pleasure at seeing so many present for the promotion of a cause he had very much at heart.

Heanor is a town of 20,000 population in the Ilkeston Division of Derbyshire, a district of small towns and villages, the nearest large cities, Derby and Nottingham, being ten miles away. The size of the Conference was the more noteworthy as the representatives had come from a somewhat widely scattered area; but what pleased the local organizers most in the reward they had for their efforts was the spirited discussion and the evident desire of the audience to explore every aspect of the question not only in respect of fundamental principles, but also as a matter of practical legislation.

The Member of Parliament for the Division, Mr G. H. Oliver, presided. The Resolution at the afternoon session was moved by Mr A. W. Madsen, B.Sc. (taking the place of Mr George D. Hardie, M.P., who unfortunately was called away to his own constituency at a moment's notice) and was seconded by Mr Arthur H. Weller, J.P., of Manchester. At the evening session, the Resolution was moved by Mr Andrew MacLaren, M.P., and seconded by Councillor George Sawyer, M.P. The Conference was reported in two columns in the *Heanor Observer* of 13th November.

The declarations adopted by the Conference were in the following terms:—

## I

"This Conference declares that the present basis of assessment for local taxation—namely, the annual rent obtainable for land and premises in their existing condition—is fundamentally unjust, and should be replaced by a system under which local revenue in town and country alike shall be raised by rates levied on the true market value of land, apart from buildings and improvements, whether the land is used or not;

"This Conference views with satisfaction the support officially given to the principle of land value rating by numerous municipalities, including, for example, the City Councils of Manchester, Sheffield, Glasgow, Bradford, Leeds, Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Bolton, Newport and Cardiff;

"And this Conference calls upon all other local authorities and the ratepayers everywhere to press on the Government the opportunity afforded in the Land Valuation Bill to provide an assessment of the land value of the whole country, so that effective legislation for the local rating of land values can follow without delay.

## II

"This Conference urges the Government to expedite the passage of the Land Valuation Bill into law, so that without delay the real value of all land, apart from buildings and improvements, shall be assessed for taxation in town and country alike, mineral rights included;

"This Conference welcomes Mr Snowden's assurance that landlord opposition to this measure will not be tolerated, and that no privileged interests will be allowed to stand in the way of the public right to appropriate land values for public purposes;

"And this Conference, convinced that the land monopoly is the abiding cause of unemployment and poverty, and denouncing all taxes and tariffs that add to the cost of living, calls for the Taxation of Land Values as the means both of liberating industry from its burdens and of raising wages, without which no solution of the unemployment problem is conceivable."

The first Resolution having been moved and seconded, many questions were asked and answered, one delegate after another rising to discuss this or that point or gain fresh information, especially in regard to the meaning and purpose of the Land Valuation Bill and the manner in which the value of land was to be ascertained. The points brought out were the injustice of the present rating system and the experience of other countries in applying the rating of land values. The sentiment was warmly applauded which, while asserting the right of the local authorities to the revenue lost to them by the private appropriation of land values, condemned subventions from the Treasury for the alleged purpose of "keeping down the rates," when in truth the effect of that cap-in-hand policy was to throw the costs of municipal government on the general taxpayer for the enrichment of the ground landowner in all parts of the country.

The Resolution was carried with one dissentient.

At 5.30 there was an adjournment for tea in the dining hall of the neighbouring secondary school, the arrangements for this interval having been made with admirable efficiency by lady members of the local Organizing Committee.

Mr Andrew MacLaren, M.P., moving the second Resolution, emphasized at once the relation between land value taxation and true free trade by calling attention to the words in the Resolution "denouncing all taxes and tariffs that add to the cost of living." He said that the Imperial Conference now in session was being used by the Protectionists to make the utmost demand on the gullibility of gullible people. But the Protectionists had met their match in the Premier of Canada, who had served them with their own medicine. Mr Bennett had made it clear at a recent meeting in the House of Commons at which he (Mr MacLaren) was present that he, as Premier of Canada and with his Government behind him, was determined to tax the products coming from England if those products gave an unfair advantage in competition with Canadian products. He also said they were determined to keep out Lancashire goods because in Canada they paid double wages. The Empire statesmen were in London at the Imperial Conference asking for Preference. They asked for the English markets for their produce, and yet were going to tax our products sent to them. It was this that made Imperial Preference the greatest farce ever known.

Let them not make the British Empire a closed Empire surrounded by a tariff wall. If they did so, other parts of civilization would do the same, and they would have the 1914-1918 cataclysm over again, for he held that war was largely brought about by tariff conflict. If you put up tariff walls you must have armaments to defend them. Begin Protection in this country, and what was going to happen? What had happened in Australia and Canada when their Trade Union leaders began to hob-nob with the big capitalists? Corruption came into public life and they could close the door to honest politics,

In every protected country to-day they had more unemployment than in this country, yet they were advocating it as a quack remedy to deal with unemployment. He held that unemployment began the moment one man denied to another man the right to use God's earth. It was because they were landless people driven by sheer force of economic conditions into the position of wage slaves in factories and at the mercy of the crowd at the gates waiting to take their jobs. If they wanted to remove these circumstances they must attack the basic causes and remove the barriers standing between men and land.

The King's Speech had announced legislation this Session for the taxation of land values. That meant the Budget, and whatever plans were in contemplation for going ahead with the Land Valuation Bill, he was satisfied that Mr Snowden would stand true to his pledges in this matter. The advantage of including the clauses for land valuation in a Finance Bill which also imposed a land value tax was that such legislation, now long overdue, could not be delayed or prevented by the House of Lords.

Councillor George Sawyer, M.P., said the laws which were operating towards unemployment should be removed from the Statute Book. Land was the common inheritance, but when two persons wanted it, it acquired added value and the possession of it gave immense power. They could not build houses unless they could get sites. He who owned the land, owned the people, and he held the freeing of the land from monopoly would solve the unemployment question.

There was again a lengthy discussion of a most informing nature, which developed into a lively though good-natured debate on the teachings of Henry George and Karl Marx. The delegates present from the Junior Imperial League were also a welcome asset in the opportunities they gave for an instructive examination of the case for and against protective tariffs. They alone held up their hands in opposition when the voting took place, and apart from these six dissentients, the Resolution was carried with acclamation.

The excellent sale of literature was a gratifying feature of the Conference, the bookstall being in charge of Mr W. Harrison, assisted by Mr Musson, of Condor (Heanor), and formerly of Manchester. The placards advertising *Progress and Poverty* (and the Essay Competition) and *Protection or Free Trade* were well displayed, and both books were recommended by the platform speakers. The stock of *Progress and Poverty* was sold out before the Conference ended, so that a number of orders had to be taken for dispatch by post. In this and other ways—in the conversations at the interval and afterwards—many new contacts were made, and Heanor can be regarded as a stronghold for the land value policy which Councillor L. Shipley and his co-workers have done so much to promote locally.

The delegation from Birmingham consisted of Councillor Bush (Smethwick) and his son, and Messrs G. G. Houghton and Chapman Wright.

The Conference concluded with an expression of its compliments and gratitude to Councillor Shipley for his services as local secretary in the work of organization, and hearty votes of thanks were accorded to Mr G. H. Oliver, M.P., for his able chairmanship, to the ladies for the tea arrangements, and to Councillor J. T. Smith, J.P., the Chairman of the Heanor Urban District Council, for his civic welcome to the delegates and visitors.

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## NOTES AND NEWS

Commenting on Mr Weller's municipal campaign, Mr A. W. McGuigan writes: "Now that the campaign is over and we can review the circumstances with calm deliberation, one point stands out quite clearly—the foolish tactics of the local Labour Party in dividing the support of those electors who were in favour of the Rating and Taxation of Land Values. In spite of some opposition within their ranks, and in spite of the fact that they are pledged to support everything that Mr Weller stood for, they decided to run a candidate to oppose him, making what was a hopeless bid for the seat. Those who voted Labour have simply been instrumental in electing a Conservative councillor in place of an Independent T.L.V. councillor. It is to be hoped that this lack of discretion in placing Party before Policy will not be repeated. The Manchester Group, however, is a sturdy one, and, like leather, tanning merely toughens them, so that at the next opportunity we hope again to contest the seat."

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Mr Alfred N. Chandler, of the Industrial Tax Relief, Inc., of Newark, New Jersey, U.S.A., is circulating some useful pieces of literature bearing on business depression and site value taxation. One of the leaflets gives prominence to a statement in the following terms:—

**"In the Speech from the Throne at the opening of Parliament to-day, King George said: 'My Ministers propose to introduce legislation to secure for the community its share in the site value of land'!"**

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A leading article in *Reynolds's News*, 19th October, describes the Land Valuation Bill as "a first step towards eliminating the evil of land monopoly." *Reynolds's* have many a time opened their columns to the case for land value taxation, and can always be depended to put in a word for the cause of economic justice and freedom.

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From an editorial comment in the *Co-operative News*, 18th October: "We welcome the prospect of the taxation of land values, but we hope Mr Snowden will, in this matter, display the same doggedness that he displayed when he was handling our financial business with the European Powers."

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