

UNEMPLOYMENT, ITS CAUSE AND THE REMEDY

By Mr J. H. McGuigan



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Some of our public leaders appear to accept the hopeless view that unemployment is in the natural order of things like the ebb and flow of the tide, and that just as there are spring tides and neap tides, there may be many unemployed at one period and few unemployed at another period—abnormal unemployment and normal unemployment—but always unemployment. That this is the natural order is a superficial view and not in accordance with the facts.

Men do not want work. What they want is the results of work. They must work to obtain goods to satisfy their desires. And as there is no limit to human desires there is no limit to the amount of work required to be done. Therefore, there should be no unemployed. The difficulty is to obtain the desired goods. And like all other men, the unemployed want the most goods for the least work. The only source from which goods can be obtained is the earth, *i.e.*, the land. If all men had equal liberty to use the land, the unemployed could produce for themselves food, clothes, houses and other desirable goods. But a man deprived of liberty to use land cannot produce anything for himself, whatever his ability and however great his need.

A number of men, whether few or many, deprived of liberty to use land cannot produce anything. They can neither employ themselves nor employ each other. They are as helpless as fish out of water.

Primitive men, without capital, without trade, without science, employed themselves. The lower animals that have access to land employ themselves.

Robinson Crusoe on an island by himself could not be unemployed. And if one man after another got on the island with Robinson, until there were a hundred of them, if they had equal liberty to use the land, the last man would be just as fully employed as Robinson. But make Robinson the owner of the island and the other 99 are thereby deprived of liberty to employ themselves. They could be employed only if he wanted their help and on his terms. Those whom he did not require would be unemployed—surplus population.

Loss of liberty to use the land is evidently the cause of men being unable to employ themselves, either individually or co-operatively; deprived of land, they must seek an employer. An obvious reason why landholders do not employ more men is that they are taxed for putting land into use, *i.e.*, taxed for employing labour, and are not taxed for holding valuable land out of use. This practice makes it more profitable to keep some land vacant waiting for higher prices than to employ labour and put the land into use.

Equal liberty to the use of land can be restored by abolishing all the taxes that now obstruct production and exchange and taxing land values so that whoever holds a piece of land, whether in use or not, will have to pay to the community that value which arises from communal activity. No one could then afford to hold valuable land out of use: the more valuable the land,

there would be the more tax to pay. As there is no real scarcity of land, there would then be enough for all on equal terms.

The land value policy means that most valuable land would naturally fall into the possession of the best users, *i.e.*, the men who could obtain the best results and pay the highest wages. Instead of unemployed men competing for jobs, the landholders would be competing for workers and unemployment would be no more.

NOTES AND NEWS

CROWN RENTS.—According to a statement in the House of Commons, 17th November, Mr Middleton, representing the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, in answer to a question said: The Bishop of London's Paddington Estate amounted last year to £48,271; 1920, £22,861; 1910, £19,752; 1900, £15,398. Mr Middleton said the increased receipts have arisen partly from the falling into possession of properties of the smaller class, now managed directly by the Estate Trustees and well maintained, but chiefly from new leases and renewals of leases of houses of the richer class at greatly increased rents over the former ground rents. Mr Middleton further stated that the property in the area of which the conditions have been adversely criticized is held against the Commissioners and the Estate Trustees on a lease for 2,000 years on terms settled in the year 1812, when the area was bare land and the ground rent received by the Commissioners represents the value of the bare land and does not amount to £2 in respect of each house since erected thereon by the lessees or their sub-lessees.

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De Nieuwe Aarde (The New Earth), organ of the Dutch Land Reform League and Taxation of Land Values, prints in its September issue a Dutch translation of the famous "Land Song" to the tune of "Marching Through Georgia"—*God shiep deu grond voor ons allen*.

There is an informing review of the British Land Valuation Bill, and other articles deal with the activities of the Dutch League on the home front.

Most of the space in the October issue of the Journal is given to the first instalment of the translation of Mr W. R. Lester's "Unemployment and the Land" (published by the United Committee) and the translation will be completed in the November number. This compliment to Mr Lester's able statement is warmly appreciated.

De Nieuwe Aarde is edited by Mr L. A. B. Ulehake and is obtainable (annual subscription, post paid, 2s. 2d.) from the publishers, Gen. Vetterstr 32, Amsterdam W.

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TOBACCO 1s. 6d. PER LB., TAX 11s. 3d.—The *News-Chronicle*, 20th November, reports that at the London Docks two cases supposed to contain condensed milk were opened and found to contain tobacco. The bo'sun of the ship "Jolly Boy" was summoned yesterday at Tower Bridge, and in answer to a question by the Magistrate, said the Customs officer said the tobacco was worth 1s. 6d. per lb. plus 11s. 3d. duty. The Magistrate, Mr Campion murmured: "Dear, dear, the wretched consumer pays 11s. 3d. for the privilege of smoking 1s. 6d. worth of tobacco and 8s. 3d. for the luxury of drinking a bottle of whisky." The smuggler was fined £50.

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Only this last week, what is, for the centre of London, the large frontage of 450 feet at the corner of Berkeley Square and Brunton Street has been sold for, it is said, much more than a million. Upon this superb site the Canadian Pacific Railway intends to build an hotel of 700 rooms.—*Observer*, 16th November.