

THE PARLIAMENTARY SITUATION,

(From the Review's Special Correspondent, F. Skirrow, General Secretary of the Yorkshire Branch of the English League for the Taxation of Land Values.)

Forces making for political progress are in evidence here more than ever. Day by day knowledge sinks deeper and spreads wider. Intellectually and morally the people are being awakened, and an ever increasing number feel and feel passionately "that it is manifestly against the law of nature that . . . a handful of people should be surfeited with superfluities, whilst a famishing multitude is in need of bare necessities." More and more is the connection being forced upon them that the primary cause of the unjust distribution of wealth and power is land monopoly and the taxation of industry.

The evolution which is quietly taking place in Great Britain to-day is of a far-reaching character. It will so alter the constitution that the will of the people must prevail as it never has before. Only the other day while the Parliament Bill which is to destroy the Veto power of the Lords over all money bills, and limit it in the case of all other bills, was under discussion, the only Tory member present in the House of Commons was Lord Ronaldshay, who himself was addressing the House. His colleagues were out in the lobbies and committee rooms fighting out their private differences. They are all at "sixes and sevens," not only on the Tariff question and the Veto question but also on the Land Taxes. Writing to the Yorkshire *Daily Observer* the other day the Parliamentary correspondent reproduced a statement made by a Unionist who himself has been a prominent opponent of Form IV:—

"This whimper about Form IV has lost us two elections and will cost us another if they only keep it up long enough. It is idle for Helmsley and Pretyman—both wealthy men—to expect the great mass of the people to sympathize with them. Those whom the shoe pinches do not need to be told to cherish their grievances and the rest of the world will not be induced to feel them by any amount of talking."

Reports of Parliamentary debates; results of bye elections; and discussion everywhere go to prove that the people's cause is winning, and that the next few years will very probably yield a rich harvest of Democratic measures.

That the Government still has the confidence of the Electors is shown by the recent bye-elections. In the Forest of Dean Parliamentary division where Sir Charles Dilke sat as the member up to his recent death, the result of the election to fill the vacancy was a Liberal Victory with an increased majority of 106 over that of Sir Charles' best. The M. P. for North East Lannark having been given a position which necessitated his resignation from Parliament, a bye-election followed. Notwithstanding the fact that it had not the slightest chance of winning the Seat the Labor Party put up a candidate, and so tended to give the seat to the opposition.

Again the Government Candidate won, the figures being:—

Miller (Lib.).....	7976.
Goff (Tory).....	6776.
Robertson (Lab).....	2879.
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Liberal majority over Tory.....	1200.
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There is a marked difference in the position of political parties. The progressive forces were never better marshalled than they are now under Premier Asquith, and it is doubtful whether any leader of political forces was ever better served than Asquith by such men as Winston Churchill, Lloyd George, Edward Grey, Alex. Ure, J. H. Whitley and others.

In the House of Commons the other day Lord Hugh Cecil, in one of his outbursts, declared that "the Prime Minister is the subtlest of the beasts of the field, and if he had to undertake the temptation in the Garden of Eden he would assume the form, not of the serpent, but of a retired archangel of moderate and progressive views."

In a recent article on the Prime Minister, Mr. T. P. O'Connor says:

"Asquith has a certain superficial hardness, as all great men have, but it is hardness with immense softness combined; and the softness of his heart is only equalled by his passionate sense of justice, his transcendent generosity, and his perfectly appalling unselfishness."

Following such a leader with so many brilliant lieutenants, in a cause which is at once human, just, and expedient, one can hardly doubt that we are at last within measurable distance of our great reform.

The other day (March 9th) Mr. Asquith was suddenly called away to Switzerland where one of his daughters had been taken seriously ill, and Mr. Churchill was left to lead the House. When the young Tories learnt of this they set themselves the task of discrediting the Home Secretary as a Parliamentary Leader. The opposition was led by Lord Hugh Cecil in a determined attempt to break Mr. Churchill's lead. That it was more of a personal attack than political is generally admitted.

The sitting, which lasted for 19 hours, was a substantial triumph for the temporary leader.

The Parliamentary correspondent of the Yorkshire *Daily Observer* tells us dramatically that:—

"The pale, unflinching figure at the table facing the full strength of the Unionist storm was always a good sight to see, and on this side of high courage and resolution the Home Secretary came out of the fray with all honor. In this regard also special praise is due to the Chairmanship of Mr. J. H. Whitley, to whose unshaken nerve and quiet but firm rulings the House owed again and again its extrication from what threatened to become a scene of uncontrollable disorder. There has been no better Chairmanship of a difficult Parliamentary situation in any recent Parliament, and at the end of the day there was a general

expression of the high appreciation in which the work of the Deputy-Chairman of Committees was held. Halifax has reason to be proud of its members."

The Mr. Whitley above referred to is one of our staunchest friends and is an ex-President of the English League for the Taxation of Land Values.

In spite of all the bad temper there was some good fun. One of the Irish Members (Mr. McVeagh) described three noble Lords; Cecil, Castlereagh and Helmsley—as the "three triplets in the Corner," a name which they will not soon lose.

The House met again on Friday, and in the evening Mr. Churchill, after the previous all-night sitting in the House of Commons, attended a dinner given in honor of the 23 M. P.'s who won seats from the Tories at the last election. In proposing the toast of the guests he referred to the great advance of the past two years, and said:

"The advance was due in the first place to the firm and courageous leadership of the Prime Minister, to the staunch integrity of Sir Edward Grey, and to the profound and original genius of Mr. Lloyd George. (Cheers). The great reason for this improvement was the fact that they had followed without swerving a policy of decision and of resolution, aimed at the citadel of the enemy's power. All they need for victory now was resolution. The only thing that could rob the Liberal party of its triumph would be vacillation or weakness. There would be none (Cheers).

And again:

"There was only one motto for Radicals and Liberals at the present time, and that was 'Full steam ahead.' If there was any ramming to be done they were going to do it.

Let those who did not like the game give them fair seaway."

Given a great cause, an unrivalled leader supported by such dashing Lieutenants, imbued with the fighting spirit that now animates the progressives, is it any wonder that a great change has come over the political situation?

If the forces of progress were never stronger it is certain that the forces of reaction were never so distracted.

To quote again that old Parliamentary hand, T. P. O'Connor:

"The run of bad luck not only continues with the Tory party, but it is getting worse every hour. The first week of the session was bad; the second was worse; the third is worst of all. Indeed, things have now got so bad that the Tory Party is the laughing stock of the whole world; it is a laughing stock even to itself."

Up to the present the Government majorities have been highly satisfactory. The first division of the Veto Bill was taken on Feb. 22nd. and the voting was:

For the Bill	351.
Against	227.
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Majority for the Bill	124.

There is, however, one little cloud hovering over the Government, but we trust it will soon blow over. The Government came into power pledged to economy, yet the Naval estimates are going up to such an extent that one has feared that on this question the Government might be defeated and all our high hopes dashed to the ground. However, the discussion took place last night and one feels that the air is somewhat cleared and the crisis passed, for we are assured by Mr. McKenna that we have reached the high water mark of Naval expenditure. It is surely high time we had.

The Land Values group in the House of Commons is the strongest ever elected, and, with our old friend, Alderman W. P. Raffan, M. P., acting as Honorary Secretary to the group, no reasonable opportunity of pressing forward taxation of Land Values is likely to be lost.

Parliament was opened by their Majesties on Feb. 6th, and within a week or so Captain Pretzman was making attacks upon the United Committee and on Mr. Fels for the support he is giving to it to promote Land Reform.

This attack produced an interesting passage at arms between Mr. Raffan and the gallant Captain, who is president of the Land Union.

The latter gentleman said:

"The United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values had a very ambitious programme. He held in his hand a statement recently issued with the names of 143 Hon. members sitting on the Ministerial side of the House printed upon it. No doubt it was rather tempting when £5,000 was placed at their disposal for a propaganda, for them to spend it for the advantage of the principles in which they believed. (Ministerial cries of "Oh, oh.")

Mr. Raffan (Lancashire, Leigh Min.), Mr. Speaker, is the Hon. gentleman entitled to say that members of this House who have signed a memorial have had £5,000 placed at their disposal for their purpose?

The Speaker: I do not know that there is any harm in having £5,000 placed at your disposal. There are several gentlemen on the Treasury Bench who receive that sum.

Mr. Pretzman: I hope the Hon. Gentlemen does not think there was anything offensive in my statement.

Mr. Raffan: It is utterly untrue.

Mr. Pretzman: Why it has been admitted over and over again.

Mr. Raffan: I deny it. It is absolutely and utterly untrue.

The Speaker: Order, Order! The Hon. member will have an opportunity later of stating the exact circumstances.

Mr. Pretzman: I hope the Hon. member for Leigh does not think I suggested that the 143 members of this House themselves had any part of this £5,000. I said it had been placed at their disposal for the purpose of this propaganda.

Mr. Raffan: That is wholly untrue.

Mr. Pretzman: Mr. Joseph Fels stated so in public, and it has been admitted in debate in this House. There is no concealment about it. Continuing, Mr. Pretzman argued that the propaganda of the United Committee was

based on the principle that it was possible to tax the unimproved surface of the globe, that the tax would not fall on any single individual in the country, and that there would be no other tax—the planet would pay. Why this planet? It would be much more attractive and just as reasonable if they were to say the moon. Why not call themselves the Moon Taxers?

Mr. Wedgewood: Why not call yourself the moon Union?

Mr. Pretyman: asked how could the bare, unimproved land pay any tax. The Hon. gentlemen who put forward that fantastic and impossible proposal were the real fathers of the land taxes. They looked on the land taxes merely as a step towards the attainment of that further theoretical proposal, and that accentuated the strong objections of the Opposition to the tax. The only possible outcome in the future would be either the obtaining of a dishonest revenue or a waste of time and money without any benefit to the revenue wha ever.

Mr. Raffan: explaining his interruption of the last speaker, said the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values was as different from the 143 members on the Government side of that House who signed the memorial as was the Land Union from the Conservative Party, and it was not true to say that the 143 members of the House had received the £5,000 (Cheers). He did not deny that the United Committee had received this sum of £5,000. There was no discredit in their doing so. Even the Land Union itself could only be maintained by voluntary subscription. Was it still alleged that there ought not to be taxation on land values? The Land Union has failed in their efforts to make the land taxes a dead letter, and all their agitation had been dropped during the election. The leader of the Opposition hauled down the flag and stated his view that the tax ought to be applied to local purposes, and the Hon. member who had just spoken actually had seconded a resolution in favor of hauling over the tax for local purposes.

Mr. Pretyman denied the statement.

Mr. Raffan repeated the statement, and said it was time the Hon. and right Hon. gentlemen opposite ceased to speak with two voices. It could not be denied that under our present system the value of land apart from improvements was ascertained every day on the expiration of the lease. A 20 years lease of a house in Piccadilly at a rent of £80 expired in 1909, and the rent demanded by the landlord under a new lease was £1,800, the old building to be pulled down and a more costly one erected. When the old building was pulled down what did the tenant get in exchange for his £1,800? Was he paying on anything but the bare land? In Sheffield at the expiration of a lease the rent was increased from £5 10s to £150, with £1,000 spent on the improved building. When the old building was demolished did not the draper tenant pay the landlord, the Duke of Norfolk, on Land Value? At Eastbourne the Duke of Devonshire 17 years ago sold 10 acres of land for £7,000 for a cemetery. Now 7½ acres more were required for a similar purpose and £1,700 was demanded. What was the increased value upon? Was it not on bare land? All this agitation was raised by the men who saw their

power to oppress leaseholders slipping from them. Was it not well known that men who had devoted their lives to building up a business, when the lease of the premises fell in, had prohibitive terms imposed for a renewal of the lease and were ruined, all their improvements becoming the property of the landlords? If the right Hon. Gentleman and his Land Union wish to go on with their agitation they are welcome to the support of these 4,200 people who own half the land of this country. But if the party on the other side hope that there is any future for them, if there is to be such a thing as a Conservative democracy, and it is a possible thing—it is incumbent upon them to pay less attention to these 4,200 people, and to pay some attention to the 42,000,000 people of this country who own not an acre, not a yard not a foot of soil of their native land. If the conflict goes on, if the party on the other side identify themselves with this narrow, selfish, partisan, aristocratic policy, with the party of those who bolster up the Lords, who, in the words of the Member for West Birmingham (Mr. Joseph Chaimberlain), "toil not neither do they spin," then let them continue their agitation. We will continue ours, with the generous help of Mr. Fels, or without the aid of Mr. Fels. Setting ourselves upon the basis of justice we will appeal to the democracy, and we have no doubt as to what will be the final issue of the struggle."

Thanks to the attack of Captain Pretyman the debate on Land Values was so valuable from the United Committee's point of view that it has been reproduced as a supplement to the March issue of *Land Values*,* and makes more than 23 pages of interesting and instructive reading.

Amongst other members who spoke in support of taxing land values were the Lord Advocate (Mr. Ure), J. C. Wedgewood, Francis Neilson, H. G. Chancellor, C. E. Price, Philip Morrell, G. Lansbury and James Parker (Labor Member for Halifax). Not many years ago Mr. Parker was one of the Labor Leaders who sneered at Single Tax as a scheme for merely benefiting capitalists. Thanks to the work of our friend C. H. Smithson in Halifax, our proposals now command the support of this socialist leader.

The Memorandum mentioned by Mr. Pretyman is the one given in my letter appearing in Nov.-Dec. issue of the *Review*. More than 150 signatures have now been placed on this important document, which is to form the basis of a bill shortly to be drafted and presented to the House of Commons.

The United Committee and the various leagues are now turning their attention to the agricultural question, and with a view to propaganda work in the agricultural constituencies are preparing a series of leaflets and pamphlets dealing with that side of the question.

SEND in your orders now for the Special Vancouver Number of the SINGLE TAX REVIEW—out June 1st.

* *Land Values* is the ably edited and vigorous organ of the Single Taxers of Great Britain and is published at 20 Tothill Street, Westminster, London, Eng.