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[p. 2]

‘Land Nationalization.’

To the Editor of “The Radical.”

Sir,—I find in last week’s issue that your correspondent Alfred R. Wallace has noticed my letter in reference to the mode that might be adopted to bring about the nationalization of the land.

Now, Sir, I think I have somewhat to complain of the manner of the notice. No doubt Mr. Wallace is a master of the subject, undoubtedly he thinks he is; but I have not yet been privileged to see what he may have written on the subject. I must enquire for it. No doubt a flood of light will be my reward, as it has proceeded from “One that understands what his proposals lead to.” What I complain of is, that he has not been careful not to misrepresent what I wrote. After referring to Mr. Wilson’s proposition, he says that Mr. Armfield’s are even worse, and then, after the unfair reference, he postulates, and exclaims, “No scheme whatever that recognises and actually provides for the perpetual existence of a large portion of the population living in idleness on the labours of the rest, is worthy of a moment’s consideration by Radicals.”

Bravo Wallace, so say I. But how Mr. Wallace could have read my letter as to have jumbled together ideas so utterly foreign to the scheme propounded, is past my conception. I think I may say, in his own words, “Really, before you ventilate other people’s opinions on this great question, you should try and understand what their proposals are.”

What I suggested as a reasonable, equitable, and convenient mode of carrying out in this country, the change from private holdings of land, to the nationalization of land, was that Land Boards be appointed for the special dealing with the land, and that every freeholder in each county should be required to have his estate registered, with all particulars relating thereto. The title deeds would tell their own tale, and the owner of the deed should be invited to sell his interest, and the Board having power to purchase should in the name and on behalf of the nation become the purchaser; but if the freeholder demurred to the sale, then I proposed he should be taxed with an annually rising tax, without regard to the absolute value of the land, until the full value of rental was reached. The annual turn of the screw would tend to break up the great estates, and thus set free very much that now lies idle, to become the profitable field of labour. It should be remembered, while the land became common property, and rent became the revenue of the State, the property on the land would, as the product of manual labour would, remain the private property of the owner who would have to pay a ground rent to the State.

I am one of those fortunate people called a freeholder. If for the public good I am called on to deliver up what I have paid for, I feel I should be entitled to receive from the public Exchequer the exact price I paid. No enhanced value should be demanded or paid and I believe the public voice would accord me that, whatever Mr. Wallace might think to the contrary. And therefore I am bound to accord the same right to all others. What they or their ancestors have paid in money ought in money to be refunded by the State. But there can be no doubt that there are many of the large estates in this country that can show no equivalent given for their inheritance, which is fully confirmed by that excellent letter that appeared in the *Radical* some four or five weeks back from Professor Newman. There restitution would be justly called for. Until the work of the Land Boards had proceeded sufficiently to have a clear analysis of title deeds, it would be impossible to form an approximate judgment of the money claim on the Government Exchequer.

Sir, in my *multum in parvo* letter of the 12th, I, as briefly as I knew how, shadowed forth in what way it is possible for Government to work out the problem, the financial problem of ways and means, without embarrassment. Mr. Wallace in his hurry to extinguish the writer has not noticed that suggestion. It is undoubtedly an essential part of the subject, however much we may be opposed to create a body of idle receivers of public money; nevertheless, if we take from a person what has cost him money, for the public benefit, then we are bound to reimburse him from the public exchequer.

Then arises the question, and it is a big one, how is that to be provided for, financially? The currency here forces itself upon our attention. If, as some have suggested, the Government created stock, and settled with the freeholder by the issue of bonds 3 per cent., that would meet the case, but that would never do—that would be an error of the greatest magnitude, adding another millstone to the neck of the wealth-producing class. No, no, that would never be allowed. Better far for them to hold the land as they now do than the landlord class to be quartered on the working class for all time. Better far, like poor impoverished down-trodden Ireland, bear as well we may the crushing weight of the now-too-well-known “Resources of Civilization” for a time, for to an end that must come. But only convert it into a national debt, and the unborn millions are sold to slavery and death. How, then, shall the difficulty be met, or how is the money to be provided? *What is money?* A most interesting question, and the proper answer at the present time is most important. Money is, or ought to be, a national ticket, issued by the exchequer of the nation for value received. Its quality is nothing; its stamp of value everything. What follows? Let the Government, by the order of the House of Commons, create at the Mint all that is required by the nation. But some people will scream out, “What! Have paper money?” Yes, yes. What have we now? Mr. Mulhall tells us that “the trade of Great Britain at present is carried on by means of 99 1/2 per cent. of paper, and only 1/2 per cent. of the precious metals.” When we know that as a fact, the delusion of our having a gold basis must vanish, and all objections to an entire paper currency for ever removed. No depreciation can take place when its value is fixed by the Government. The Land Question can be settled without injustice to anyone. Millions of acres can be brought into cultivation, the house markets can be supplied by home produce, every branch of industry will receive healthy stimulus by the higher wages and greater demands. I beg to assure Mr. Wallace that I think I know what my proposals lead to, and have the largest number confidence that the largest amount of good will flow to the amount of people, provided they are not stock jobbers, money changers, and bill discounters. Their interests I have not taken into account.

W. M. Armfield.

*The Alfred Russel Wallace Page*, Charles H. Smith, 2020.