

4. and very reluctantly being learned. Human nature does not change, but human conduct varies with changing circumstances. And as circumstances are man-made, they can be altered in such a way that goodwill and peace will take the place of suspicion and strife. The key to this happy prospect may be found in "Progress and Poverty" by Henry George.

"ASSISTANTS WANTED".

A northern multiple-shop firm in need of assistants recently offered the following inducements: Excellent wages, Convenient hours, Holidays with pay, Interesting career, Staff canteen, Welfare benefits. Not very long ago employment was regarded as a boon, both by employers and workers, and employees were described as "hands" - "hoads" being the employers' function and monopoly. To-day employers advertise for "young ladies" and seem to regard their services as favours. To workers hitherto ill-paid and treated with scant courtesy this is a welcome change, but how did it come about, and will the improvement be permanent? It all depends! Not due to Governments.

Neither the Tory Government in pre-war days, nor the present Socialist Government, were capable of depressing or improving the conditions of life of these people. And there has been no change of heart on the part of employers. The improvement is due to the fact that in the low-wage period there were more workers than jobs, whereas there are now in many industries more jobs than workers.

In spite of ignorant condemnation and derision, the Law of Supply and Demand continues to operate in depressing or raising the workers' standard of life in accordance with the abundance or scarcity of what the workers have to sell (their labour) in relation to the demand for it. Where no opportunities for self-employment are available, there is always labour for sale and the labour-market is generally overstocked. In other words, low wages and poor conditions are results of the competition for jobs due to unemployment, and this is inevitable in all civilised countries where land is treated as the private property of a few privileged people.

Mutual Interests.

Although it does not always appear to be so, employers and workers in industry co-operate in the production and distribution of wealth. In free conditions they would meet on equal terms, as partners in industry, and their co-operation would be consciously undertaken for mutual advantage and profit. But to secure such conditions, the source of production (land) must be freed from private monopoly. Equality of opportunity and genuine brotherhood can be won by breaking down the legal barriers which deprive the masses of their natural right to use the earth. Taxation of Land Values instead of the present system of taxation provides the practical remedy.

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BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS.

Speaking at a meeting of the British group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in February, Mr. E. Bevin said if peace were to be preserved, basic human rights must be accepted throughout the world. This is a worthy ideal, but the more immediate and practical need is the acceptance of basic human rights in our own country. The first of these is the common right to use the country's natural resources, land, which for generations has been treated as the private property of a privileged class of landowners. How this iniquity began is described by Herbert Spencer in "Social Statics",

us:

"Soldiers, not lawyers, were the conveyancers; blows were the current coin given in payment (for the land); and for seals, blood was used in preference to wax. Could valid claims be thus constituted? Hardly. And if not, what becomes of the pretensions of all subsequent holders of estates so obtained? Does sale or bequest generate a right where it did not previously exist? Would the original claimants be nonsuited at the bar of reason because the thing stolen from them had changed hands? Certainly not. And if one act of transfer can give no title, can many? No; though nothing be multiplied forever, it will not produce one"

"But time, say some, is a great legaliser. (To prove) this, however, they must find satisfactory answers to such questions as, How long does it take for what was originally wrong to grow into a right? At what rate per annum do invalid claims become valid? If a title gets perfect in a thousand years, how much more than perfect will it be in two thousand years? - and so forth. For the solution of which they will require a new calculus."

The ancient wrong of landlordism can be ended by Land Values Taxation. By adopting this policy Britain could set an example to the world in doing first things first, and by thus establishing the primary basic human right at home, lead to universal justice and peace.

"A NEW LIBERALISM"

Some years ago Arthur Birnie published a criticism of Henry George under the title of "Single-Tax George". Mr. Birnie, who is Lecturer in Economic History at Edinburgh University, has recently produced a pamphlet entitled "A New Liberalism for the New Age" in which Liberals are recalled to their original individualistic standpoint - with modifications. The twentieth century will be remembered, says the author, as the age of totalitarianism. The Liberal Party's abandonment of its robust individualism, and its drift towards State intervention and Socialism culminated, he says, in the election of 1945 when the party went to the electorate with a programme of State Planning based on Beveridge's book "Full employment in a Free Society". This criticism is deserved and timely, but in outlining a new Liberal programme Mr. Birnie shows himself to be an untrustworthy guide. He rightly defines the functions of the State as mainly negative: "to prevent men doing things which are detrimental to the social welfare" but seems to forget this when he proposes to use the power of the State to deprive the owners of capital of their earnings in the form of interest. Unfortunately Mr. Birnie is unable to prove in fifteen pages of print that "the failure of Liberals to see the inconsistency of interest with Liberal principles was largely responsible for the breakdown of Liberalism as an economic policy". His arguments, unsupported by evidence, only show that the author has himself drifted from a robust individualism to something akin to Socialism. Interest he describes as both the result and the cause of monopoly, and the various theories which profess to justify its payment are dismissed as inconsistent with each other and, taken singly, "not one of them will hold water". As Mr. Birnie does not mention it, perhaps he has not considered the theory that interest paid by a borrower to a lender of capital (including that received by house-owners and shopkeepers) is payment for services rendered. This being a common belief and accepted custom - exemplified in "houses to let" and domestic shopping - it is difficult to imagine robust individualists accepting the bureaucratic measures required to put an end to it.

An ambiguous economist.

First in his list of reforms Mr. Birnie places Land Nationalisation. He argues that as land is a natural and indestructible monopoly its ownership must be transferred to the State, "though this would be a disagreeable necessity to the average Liberal with his dislike of State intervention". If, however, the average Liberal is capable of swallowing Mr. Birnie's proposal to abolish interest, he is not likely to boggle at land nationalisation.

The question of compensating the people who would be deprived of their present incomes by the "New Liberalism" is dealt with in the

author's third reform. These people - landowners, shareholders and creditors generally - are entitled, he says, "to their capital only, but not to rent, interest or dividends". He goes on to argue that, for the sake of convenience, "we must assume that this wealth (the property of the landowners and shareholders) has been created by labour or accumulated by abstinence". If Mr. Birnie had taken the trouble to understand the famous author he criticised in "Single-Tax George", he would have known the difference between land and wealth, and would have avoided the confusion resulting from careless definitions. A landowner who owns capital is a capitalist as well as a landowner, but the two kinds of "property" and the incomes derived from their ownership are different in kind, morals and effects. Failure to recognise this difference leads to such confusion as Mr. Birnie's assumption that land (the property of landowners) like capital (the property of capitalists) has been created by labour or accumulated by abstinence, which is manifestly absurd. In "Progress & Poverty" Henry George says indistinctness in the use of terms leads to ambiguity and indeterminateness in reasoning, and elsewhere argues that the power to reason correctly results from enquiring the meaning of the words we use and making sure of one step before building another on it. The difference between the source of production (land) and the things drawn from it (wealth, including capital) is so obvious and fundamental that such confusion in a treatise written by a University lecturer ought to excite our surprise. But it doesn't.

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A HOARY INIQUITY.

Land Monopoly (the present system) is an ancient institution. Long before the Christian era it divided humanity into drones and workers, rich and poor, oppressors and oppressed, and through the centuries it has been a constant cause of wars, famines, and the decay of civilisations. Many attempts to improve the system have been made from time to time. As long ago as 138 B.C. a young Chinese Emperor, Wu Ti, cleared the feudal lords from his court and revoked the law of primo-geniture. Thereafter, when a great landowner died, his estate was divided among all his legitimate sons. But such a change can only increase the number of landowners without reducing the tribute which they can extort from the people. It is impossible to improve the Land Monopoly; it must be destroyed if humanity's long martyrdom is not to continue for more thousands of years.

Is the lesson being learned?

One of the lessons of history is that man's capacity for avoiding radical remedies for social wrongs is without limit. Only the removal of causes can abolish effects, but this lesson is very slowly