

Practicable Land Nationalization.

By this time a large proportion of Radicals and other genuine Social Reformers have become fully convinced that no proper settlement of the Land Question—whether in Ireland or Great Britain—can be attained except in accordance with the principles of Land Nationalization. The resolution of the Trades' Union Congress at Dundee (September, 1889), and the programme adopted by the Metropolitan Radical Federation (April, 1890), show that both London and provincial workers agree on this point.

But although the principle of the collective ownership of the soil is now so widely accepted, comparatively little attention is paid to the practical methods of giving effect to that principle. Whilst the Land Nationalisation Society (11, Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.), advocates the State purchase of the landlords' rights, and the English Land Restoration League (8, Duke Street, Adelphi, London, W.C.), insists on the Taxation of Land Values, many other means of carrying out the principle of Land Nationalization are neglected. For want of a more detailed and practical programme, Parliament is even permitted to sanction the alienation of public glebe lands and tithes; the London County Council is allowed to vote the sale of its Metropolitan land; and the Liberal leaders are forgiven their persistent hankering after Leasehold Enfranchisement in England, Peasant Proprietorship in Ireland, and the other obsolete ideals of the "Free Land" school.

The Fabian Society asserts* the necessity of the extinction of private property in land, which enables private individuals idly to appropriate, in the form of Rent, the price for permission to use the earth, as well as for the advantages of superior soils and sites.† Until all such payments are either made to the public through their representative institutions, or else recovered from the private landholders by taxation of their incomes, the benefits arising from the value of the nation's land can never be equitably shared by the whole people.

* See Prospectus of the Fabian Society.

† The difficulty of stopping short at mere "Land" Nationalization is set forth in Fabian Tract No. 7, "Capital and Land."

But the acceptance of a principle is not in itself sufficient to ensure reform. The principle must be applied to the actual circumstances of practical politics in each particular time and place, in order that the Member of Parliament, the Town or County Councillor, the Vestryman, and the Elector himself, may realise the opportunities which daily present themselves for the adoption of the principle.

Believing in the collective control by the people themselves of the country in which they live, the Fabian Society suggests the following

PRACTICAL PROGRAMME.

for Radicals and Socialists, and all other Social Reformers who are in favor of Land Nationalisation :—

1. That all existing public rights over land and its rent be carefully preserved and not alienated ; for instance :—
 - (a) That the London County Council and other public bodies should never sell any land they become possessed of.
 - (b) That no sale of Glebe Lands, Charity Lands, or Tithes in Ecclesiastical or other public ownership be permitted.
 - (c) That no Crown Lands be sold, or Crown leaseholds allowed to be "enfranchised."
 - (d) That all existing commons, footpaths, roadside wastes, rights of way, fishings, &c., &c., be carefully maintained, especially by local public authorities.
 - (e) That no measure of Land Purchase for occupying ownership, peasant proprietorship, or leasehold enfranchisement, be permitted, whether in Ireland or Great Britain.*
2. That all financial reforms leading in the direction of the taxation of land values be strongly supported, such as :—†
 - (a) The abolition or even the mere diminution of Customs and Excise.
 - (b) The taxation of Ground Rents and Values.
 - (c) The rating of vacant land, including parks and squares to which the public are not admitted ; and the collection of rates upon them and upon empty houses.
 - (d) The division of rates between owner and occupier.
 - (e) The graduation and differentiation of the Income Tax.
 - (f) The re-assessment of the Land Tax.
 - (g) The equalisation, increase, and graduation of the death duties.
 - (h) The special taxation of the unearned increment.
3. That the present private rights of individual owners of land and its modifications be gradually limited in the public interest, as by :—
 - (a) Compelling owners of unused agricultural land to cultivate or sell it.
 - (b) Compelling the amplest possible precautions against accidents in mines, quarries, &c., and on railways, &c.
 - (c) Limiting railway rates and charges.

* See Fabian Tract No. 11, "The Workers' Political Programme."

† See Fabian Tract No. 5, "Facts for Socialists."

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- (d) Limiting the hours of work in mines, on railways and tramways, on all public monopolies, and wherever else possible.*
 - (e) Enforcing against house owners all necessary sanitary laws,
 - (f) Granting public access to lakes, rivers, and all natural waters; to mountains, river and lake margins, foreshores, and other lands where no damage will be done by "trespassing."
 - (g) Reserving to the public authorities all future unearned increment of land values.
 - (h) Reform of the present system of granting excessive compensation for property taken for public objects without deduction for the owner's misuse or neglect.
4. That public authorities gradually take over all leading public services:
- (a) The municipalization of all waterworks, gasworks, tramways, &c.†
 - (b) The public provision and maintenance of all schools, libraries, &c.
 - (c) The public supply and maintenance of artisans' dwellings, allotments, cottages, &c.
 - (d) The public administration of railways and canals.
 - (e) The nationalization of mining royalties.
 - (f) Acquisition by public authorities of land whenever and wherever possible.

* See Fabian Tract No. 9, "An Eight Hours Bill."

† See Fabian Tract No. 8, "Facts for Londoners."

All candidates for public offices, whether for Parliament, for Town or County Councils, or for Vestries or Local Boards, should be asked whether they accept these proposals. Suitable questions are given in Fabian Tract No. 11, "The Worker's Political Programme."

This is, of course, not a complete programme, even of Land Nationalization; and complete Land Nationalization would itself leave other reforms still necessary. But every proposal in this programme could be immediately carried out by the present administrators of our public affairs without injustice or disturbance. Many of them, indeed, relate to matters already within the discretion of public authorities, and left unheeded only because the attention of Land Nationalizers has not been directed to them.

NOTE ON COMPENSATION.—The Compensation to Landlords which Land Nationalizers rightly resist must not be confounded with payments made by public bodies to private owners for plots of land required for direct use by the public or their representatives. As the funds for such purchases must be obtained by increased burdens on land values, the payment will not really be an indemnity, but simply a means of compelling the entire landlord class to share the loss that would otherwise fall on the single member whose particular plot of land was required, and who would thus be ruined, whilst the rest of the landlords enjoyed their property undisturbed. Public opinion would never sanction so partial a proceeding, and it is therefore certain that land nationalized in this way will always be purchased at the expense of the landowners generally.

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