

THE CRISIS

By R. L. OUTHWAITE

(Secretary of the Commonwealth League)

(I) THE COMMONWEALTH LEAGUE

Equality of Opportunity.

All human beings born into the world are born with an inherent equal right to life. Life being a manifestation of natural law, and only to be sustained by access to nature, it follows that inasmuch as all have an equal right to life, all have an equal right to the air, and to a foothold on the earth. But inasmuch as access to the Land under the circumstances of these days secures opportunity of varying degrees of advantage, the equal right of all has to be established in conformity with these conditions. The law of rent determines, from the starting point of that land from which no rent is obtainable, because of lack of superior advantage, the value of the opportunity that any other land provides, and to secure which land rent is paid. The equal right of all to the land can be established by each occupier of the common property paying into a common fund the annual value of the privilege of holding any particular portion, a value ascribed to it directly by nature and by the presence of the community. Then all land will be held as from the community, and land rent will be paid to the community to meet communal needs. The community will then be the sole ground landlord. Thus all human beings born into the world will be born into it as its equal inheritors. Thus the equal right to life will be established.

ORIGIN OF THE LEAGUE.



THE Commonwealth League was founded by a group of men who had been associated with the movement for the taxation and rating of land values as fiscal measures in keeping with the needs and the political circumstances of the past. The founders saw that the needs of the near future would be immeasurably greater, and that, instead of having to present their cause to a timid Liberal Party tied to the vested interests, they would have to present it to a Labour Party, urged on by the rank and

file determined to secure the overthrow of the system of wage-slavery which they term Capitalism. The founders of the League were influenced by the concept of duty conveyed in Lowell's words in "The Crisis":

"New occasions teach new duties;
Time makes ancient good uncouth
He must upward still and onward
Who would keep abreast of truth."

They saw that the hour had arrived to lift the cause for which Henry George lived and died, for which many of his followers have lived and died, out of the category of rates and taxes, and present it to the people, pure and undefiled, as a great moral issue, and the means of emancipation capable of immediate adoption. In promotion of this conviction as to where duty lay, it was decided to abandon advocacy of taxation for the simple and uncompromising demand for the Restoration of the Land by proclamation, to be followed by payment of economic rent by those holding the common property. Then, to solve the rating problem and that of decentralisation of administration, it was decided that, after the national debt to the ex-Service men had been honoured from the Common Land Rent Fund, it should be allocated to the municipalities in accordance with population and relevant considerations, for the full satisfaction of communal needs.

Those who took this step did so in the light of past experience as propagandists. They knew how the cause of emancipation had failed because presented in fiscal terms. To the masses a tax is a tax, and a rate is a rate, and to associate the redemption of mankind with either seemed to them an absurdity. To proclaim the land to be the common property of the community, and to collect its rent for the community, is grasped at once as being a revolutionary proposal, carrying with it the greatest hope for the realisation of their desires.

The taxers and raters will get a land-tax from a Labour Government, and, as has happened in Australia and New Zealand, being a tax, it will carry the conventional exemption, and there the cause will founder.

It is the new duties that new occasions teach that the League calls upon all upholders of Freedom to assume. It is for some to blow the embers on the domestic hearth; it is for others to strive to light a beacon on the mountain top; it is for some to turn and re-turn the sods of the valley; it is for others to blaze a path upward and onward through the wilderness. It is to the latter the Commonwealth League makes its call—knowing that, come what may of the endeavour, no evil can result to the cause of Truth by proclaiming to the people the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth. The Truth as to how they have come to be enslaved, and as to how they may set themselves free, if they but have the courage to right in full an ancient wrong in the coming hour of opportunity. An hour that will come but swiftly pass, and pass beyond recall.

(2) ETHICS



HE appeal for the Restoration of the Land does not proceed from the vain imagining of self-delusion. On the ethical side it is based on the belief that the minds of men are destined to awaken to perception of a duty, which, once perceived, will compel them to action for its fulfilment. This is the day of the *danse macabre*, that is to say of the dance of spurious mirth, danced by the doomed who seek to spend the eve of a bitter fate in forgetfulness. So Youth danced and drank deep before the return to the shambles in France. That spirit of fatalism and bravado has survived the war to infect those who have other than a soldier's reason for seeking immunity from reality. Those who ostensibly rule, those who rule secretly through the Press and the mart, those who revelled in slaughter from afar off, those who befouled the temples reared to the Prince of Peace, those who saw in the prolongation of massacre the enhancement of profit, those who lied to the masses and deluded them into the belief that through murder, glorified by the name of war, they would come by the new world of their desires—all these know that for them the day of retribution will come. Meanwhile they boast and swagger like the satraps of Belshazzar at the feast:—

“They drank wine and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of wood, and of stone.”

But for them, too, the writing is on the wall: “Mene: “God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.”

If the spirit of the working people were that of these ghouls of the human slaughter-house, of these vampires glutted with blood-money, the appeal of the Commonwealth League would indeed provide food for derision. But debauchery is not persistent with those who must labour day by day or perish. For those engulfed in the pit are ever searching for the upward path, those in the valley of the shadow of death in life are wont to seek for a sign of deliverance in the skies above. Awhile they may be misled by a false dawn, awhile they may be deceived by false prophets, awhile they may be hypnotised into mistaking black infamy for white-garbed righteousness, but at hands-grips with reality in the struggle for existence they will come by the Truth, and by Truth be guided into the path of duty.

And in the hour of enlightenment a multitude of men will seek to vindicate the cause of Right. They will realise that they have blindly followed the worshippers of the foulest fetish. That at the bidding of the high priests of Moloch they have passed their children through the fire or compelled the children of their comrades to the sacrifice. They will realise the meaning of 600,000 graves in France, which we are told it will take ten years to mark with the crosses of remembrance. In something more durable than stone they will realise that the memory of the young and the brave must be perpetuated. Dimly at first,

perhaps, but in the end with terrifying clearness they will become conscious that the dead have died in vain for Britain if Britain be not made the fair habitation of all her sons and daughters. Then, no longer deluded, they must stand for the redemption of mankind or slink away with their pieces of silver to the potter's field. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church"; so will the religion of humanity spring from the world altar of human sacrifice.

In the days of realisation of what duty demands, in the night which is at hand, when the ghosts of the slain will walk and not pass unheeded, men will seek to devote themselves to some great cause whose appeal is relevant to their misgivings and desires. It cannot be that they then will scoff at the truth that Earth has been made a hell of iniquity because what Nature intended for all has been usurped by the few. That through this usurpation, this denial of the common right of all, there has grown up the privileged systems of monarchy, aristocracy, and plutocracy on the one hand, and human slavery on the other. That war, with its blood-running shambles, is but the butchery of slave-class by slave-class in the promotion of the opposing ambitions of the ruling class—the ruling class because they have appropriated the earth. That poverty, with its hunger-stricken victims consigned to premature death, is but the outcome of the struggle of slave against slave for the privilege of obtaining a master—master because privileged, slave because dispossessed. The civilian who regarded war through the mentality of the journalist, which was that of the spectator at a gladiatorial show, may be slow in coming to realisation of the truth and to recognition of what is demanded of him. But it is not so with many of those who came by reality on the battle-fields. These know where duty lies to the dead and to the living.

It is in view of the day of the awakening of the people that the Commonwealth League has put forward its demand for the assertion forthwith of the common right to the land. Politicians will contend that it is not "practical politics." War is practical politics. It is practical politics to devastate the world to settle whether Russian or German exploiters should secure the reversion of the derelict Turkish Empire. But it is not practical politics to secure to all British citizens an equal participation in the bounty that Nature has conferred on them through Britain! It is not practical politics to destroy the incentive to war and the cause of poverty by a simple act of justice! It matters not. The appeal is made past the politicians to the people they have betrayed. It is a call to the people to redeem their bodies from slavery, their minds from the control of charlatans, and their souls from the keeping of Pharisees and hypocrites. It is a call to the people to resent the debasement of human nature that the past years have effected and to bring mankind into the upward path by securing for each and all that which beneficent Nature has provided for each and all. And the appeal will not be made in vain if it but reaches the people. Great is Truth, and will prevail.

(3) ECONOMICS



NECESSITY is the mother of invention, as it provides the stimulus necessary to turn mental inertia into activity. The demand for great and fundamental reforms advocated for the attainment of an ideal state of society is always met in fair weather days with the paralysing cry: Leave well alone. In such times adventure seems to be the rashness of restless spirits and disturbers of the peace. When the ship rests in a land-locked haven and those in command can spend easeful days, they regard as madness any suggestion that anchor should be weighed and the trials and perils of the deep should be dared in order to reach some far-off shore. But it is otherwise when the storm is up, when the lightning glares and the thunder rolls and the coming of a tornado threatens to drive the ship on to a lee shore. Then it is the highest seamanship to weigh anchor and beat out in the face of the tempest on to the high seas. So the captain of H.M.S. Calliope saved his ship alone of all others at anchor in Apia Harbour. The parallel holds goods as regards statesmanship in these days. The tempest of war has been followed by the cyclone of revolution. Mighty forces are sweeping organised society on to the lee shore. The old anchors may hold for awhile, but only for awhile. Statesmanship demands of those in command the order for a full head of steam and a setting out from the old-time haven of do-nothingness. And the people dimly realise that in such a course lies the hope of salvation. Hence it is that the demand of the Commonwealth League for the Restoration of the Land, which a few years ago would have been regarded as the demand of impossibilists and visionary agitators, now can be presented as the only means of escape from imminent dangers, and is so regarded wherever presented to those on whom the catastrophe will fall heaviest. For these see that those in command have no way out, and that they will let the ship be driven on the rocks in the belief that out of the wreckage they will get for themselves a sufficiency of salvage as a result of their privileged position.

These are the days of the lull before the storm, but that the storm will come can be predicted when the forces are considered which make for its engendering. It is not to be believed that the masses who labour, who have had presented to them the vision of a new world born of sacrifice, will, without a struggle, accept the far different fate that is in store for them if they do not revolt against it. Then will come the storm, the troubling of the waters, and the recognition that safety lies in a brave setting out from the anchorage. And what is the vision of the new world, and what is the reality that is marching on inexorably to its devastation? The vision was of a new world in which the fruits of labour would be assured in full to the labourer. A vision of freedom in place of bondage, of the provision of amplitude of all that maketh glad the heart of man through co-operation of man with his fellow, and an end of the struggle for existence.

In the desert the thirst-stricken traveller is wont to see ahead of him a fair oasis with shady palms and gushing fountains. He struggles on until the mirage lifts and there remain but the burning sands on which to die. In reality his only hope lay in digging in the sands at his feet while he yet had strength. The vision of a new world amid the desert left by war, to be reached by following beaten paths of use and wont, is but a mirage to entrap men to destruction. What does this debt of £8,000,000,000 mean to those who dream of the new world in which man shall gather in full the fruits of his labour? The Government is now being compelled to borrow at 6 per cent., but we will take the terms of the Funding Loan as the standard. The advertisement of the bonds ran: "For every £80 put into the Funding Loan the State will pay £260."

So in forty years in principal and interest the sum of £26,000,000,000 will have to be provided. Which means that the bondholders will have the power to take wealth produced during the next forty years to that value. The workers will produce it and the bondholders will consume it. By so much, then, will the workers go short of the fruits of their labour. That fact alone dissipates the vision of the new world to be obtained short of a mighty convulsion.

The interest on the debt at £1,000,000 a day, the cost of pensions for the still living victims of war, the cost of Army, Navy, and Air Service to guard the spoils of conquest for the exploiters of natural resources, and to keep subject races in subjection, with vast subsidies to privileged interests, help to bring the revenue demand for this year to £1,400,000,000. In part it has been fraudulently met by the sale of stores; for the rest, except in so far as taxation falls on land rent, it is taken from the producers. It is the transference of wealth, and wealth only comes from the hand of labour. The Excess Profits Tax is based on the assumption that the exploiters will wring hundreds of millions in excess profits out of the consumers, and hand over to the State £60 out of every £100, and keep £40 for themselves. Tea is to provide £17,000,000, sugar £31,000,000, tobacco £62,470,000, and so on. And in addition there is the burden of municipal taxation, cast in the main on to the houses of the workers. The cost of the war and its results is being thrown on to the masses. They pay taxes over the counter, the tax being added to the price of the goods, together with the wholesaler's and retailer's profit on the amount of the tax. So taxation forces prices up. And as prices rise consumption will be checked. As consumption is checked, the demand for labour to produce goods will be restricted. Then unemployment will be rife and wages will be forced down, and revenue will fall away. Then, with the land locked up against the people, will come the cataclysm. Then men will see that in the Restoration of the Land, in the collection of its economic rent and the allocation of that rent to the local governments to meet communal needs, will, together with the freeing of the land to labour, provide the way of salvation. And there is none other.

(4) POLITICS



O far the case for the Restoration of the Land has been presented in relation to the inborn aspirations of the people, quickened by the world tragedy, and to the economic needs of the nation rendered imperative by the same cause. There remains to be considered how this demand stands in relation to politics. It is a striking and instructive fact that whilst, on the one hand, organised Labour is taking steps to capture the House of Commons at the next General Election, and is confident of a great measure of success, on the other hand redress by way of Parliament has come to be derided by an ever-growing number of the most active, who aim at the overthrow of the system known by them as Capitalism. The reason is not far to seek. In the first place, the Labour programme has been drafted by the Fabians, who, like Mr. Sidney Webb, stand for recognition of the private ownership of land, and claim compensation for its present appropriators. It is a re-hash of palliatives proposed before the flood of blood submerged old political landmarks. It contains no proposal for the overthrow of privilege and monopoly, and the opening of the gates so that Labour may march into possession of its own. Therefore the workers, in default of being shown how Parliament, the instrument of their subjection, can be made the instrument of their emancipation, are coming to condemn Parliament, and are seeking redress of grievances by industrial action. In the second place, there are few Parliamentary Labour leaders equipped to demand the overthrow of the old order. At the last General Election it was as difficult for an honest man to enter Parliament as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. For Labour candidates who had taken office and honours from the Coalition, or had supported it to the bitter end, the way was made easy, and in many cases they were not opposed. But those who had refused to betray the true interests of Labour were in the main overwhelmed with the opening of the sluices of falsehood and corruption. Hence the disappearance from Parliament of the representatives of the creators of the Labour Party, the I.L.P., and its only Parliamentarians competent to espouse the democratic cause.

In this lack of leadership, coupled with contempt of Parliament as at present utilised, lies a great opportunity. For the field is clear for the emergence of a great cause. To the disillusioned workers it can be shown that they are right in their contempt of Parliamentarians who have no message as to how Parliament can be made the instrument of redemption. At the same time it can be shown how, through Parliament, the Restoration of the Land can be achieved and the basis of the wage-slave system be thus removed. The proposal of the Commonwealth League is that on and from an Appointed Day the Land shall be vested in the community, and its economic rent shall be payable to the community. This full measure of Restoration can be embodied in the first Budget of a Labour

Government. Were the House of Lords to reject it, this result would follow. The Government would be without money to pay the naval and military forces of the Crown, and they would have to be disbanded. So, too, the Civil Service. The State would have no money to pay interest on the National Debt, and repudiation would be unavoidable. Faced with such alternatives, the Budget would go through, and by this simple means the Restoration of Britain to its people would be forthwith secured. Any measure requiring a Parliamentary Bill would meet its fate at the hands of the Peers if it touched vested interests. Then a constitutional struggle would be provoked, and the forces of Labour be dissipated in an ancient controversy. Hence it is that the Restoration of the Land by the appropriation of economic rent provides the strategy of social and economic revolution on constitutional lines. A Labour Government would either have to adopt this policy or abandon office in face of a revolt of the rank and file, leaving the field open for the establishment of military despotism. Therefore it is that the Commonwealth League claims that the demand it puts forward conforms to the ethical, economic, and political needs of a near and menacing future. Now is the time to bring realisation to the masses as to how alone the New World can be created. For aid in the accomplishment of that task an appeal is made to all men and women who would see the gates of opportunity thrown wide open so that the people may enter into their heritage. So that war and the struggle for existence may cease to curse mankind. So that Justice may prevail and Liberty be assured to all.

The Commonwealth League

FOLLOWING on the Military Service Act The Commonwealth League demands:

That on the APPOINTED DAY the Land shall be declared to have been Restored to the People, and thereafter its economic rent shall be collected by, and for, the People.

President: R. C. LAMBERT *Secretary*: R. L. OUTHWAITE

(Prospective Labour Candidate for Peckham)

(Prospective Labour Candidate for
Stalybridge and Hyde)

Office: 43, Chancery Lane, W.C.2. Join The Commonwealth
Telephone: Holborn 309 League at any subscription.

The *Commonweal*, 3d. monthly. 4s. a year post free.