

ROYDS E.

ORWELL PARK,
IPSWICH.

MY DEAR ROYDS,

22 Dec. '22.

I have read your statement with great interest and have no amendment to suggest, on the contrary I can confirm everything you say in it and am truly sorry that your work in Parliament is interrupted at this very critical moment for Agriculture. We miss you very much on the Agricultural Committee.

Yours sincerely,

E. G. PRETYMAN.

I have been asked by some of my former constituents to give a short account of some of the work I have done for them in Parliament during the last 13 years, in connection with Land and Housing, and I readily comply with this request.

LAND CAMPAIGN 1907-10

FOLLOWED BY

THE FINANCE (1909-10) ACT 1910.

(*"The People's Budget."*)

Shortly after I entered the House of Commons in January, 1910, The People's Budget came up for consideration. I was strongly opposed to the whole Scheme of Land Valuation and the imposition of Land Values Duties, viz., Undeveloped Land Duty, Increment Value Duty, and Reversion Duty. I regarded the Scheme as an insidious and socialistic attack on property and likely to bring about a house famine.

I opposed the Bill strenuously in the House of Commons. It passed into law in April, 1910.

Mr. Pretzman asked me to join with him in forming the Land Union. An inaugural meeting took place at the Queen's Hall on 5th May, 1910, at which I spoke and moved a Resolution. The object of the Land Union was to endeavour by every constitutional means to restore the credit and security of land and house property, shaken by recent and threatened legislation, and to carry on a determined and unceasing agitation for the repeal of the Scheme of taxation imposed by the People's Budget. To bring this about I worked continuously in and out of Parliament throughout the years 1910-14, until the outbreak of War.

I was elected Chairman of the Legal Committee of the Land Union at its formation, and have held the office ever since.

The pages of Hansard during those years will show the numerous occasions on which I spoke on this subject, moving amendments to the Address, reduction of Ministers' salaries, and taking every other constitutional step to get the Act repealed.

I invited a number of Members—over 100—in the House of Commons to form themselves into a Land Group with Mr. Pretzman as Chairman and myself as Whip, and it was through the exertions of this Land Group in the House and the Land Union outside that we were able to prove the futility of the whole Scheme. When the War broke out, the collection of the Taxes was suspended.

On the termination of the War, a Select Committee of the House of Commons was appointed to report on the Scheme. I was a Member of that Committee. We made our Report in December, 1919. I moved the recommendation of the Committee with regard to the Evidence we had taken, and on that Evidence the House of Commons, by the Finance Act, 1920, finally repealed the whole Scheme. That I had not exaggerated the seriousness of its effects and the danger of a house famine was evident to the House of Commons and the country.

HOUSING.

The Housing Act, 1919, and the duty of imposing the building of houses on Local Authorities was necessitated by the house shortage occasioned by the People's Budget. I was appointed on the Committee of the House to deal with this Bill, sat on it continuously, and was the author of the only clauses in the Bill to encourage building by private enterprise, and also of clauses enabling owners of settled estates to give land for housing purposes and to borrow money on the security of their property for cottage building. I understand that the Scheme of the new Government as at present announced is to encourage private enterprise on the lines of, and by way of extension of, the clauses I got inserted in the 1919 Act.

AGRICULTURAL LAND SALES (RESTRICTION OF NOTICES TO QUIT) ACT 1919.

In the Spring of 1919 landed estates were being sold on a very large scale, and it was the practice of some auctioneers to give notice to quit to the sitting tenant before the sale. This was a practice I thought unfair. It placed the sitting tenant at a disadvantage and encouraged land speculators to buy farms and either drive a hard bargain with the sitting tenants or sell the farms over their heads. Captain FitzRoy, Mr. Cautley and I had conferences on the subject, with the result that at a meeting between us one night at the Carlton Club I drafted this Bill to make all notices void given before a sale. Mr. Cautley revised the Bill and introduced it. It passed into law on the 10th August, 1919. It had the effect of almost abolishing the land speculator and it placed the farmer in the most favourable position for buying his own farm or having time to look out for another farm.

This Act I regard as the Farmer's Charter for security of tenure on a sale of his farm. Disturbance of tenants in practice seldom arises except on a sale, and this Act gave the farmer just that measure of protection which he so much needed.

I may add that it is almost a unique circumstance for a Bill of this far-reaching character to be drafted and introduced by private Members and so speedily passed into law.

CORN PRODUCTION ACT 1918.

AGRICULTURE ACT 1920.

CORN PRODUCTION ACTS (REPEAL) ACT 1921.

I supported the Corn Production Act, 1918, as a temporary war measure under which prices were guaranteed for wheat and oats with a minimum wage and wages boards.

I was a Member of the House of Commons Committee set up to deal with the Agriculture Act, 1920, and took an active part in the debates. I could not see my way to vote for the Third Reading of the Bill as I considered the financial scheme with regard to guaranteed prices unsound, and I could not agree to place the agricultural industry under Government control.

For the same reasons I supported the Corn Production Repeal Act, 1921, which abolished Government control, guaranteed prices and wages boards, setting up in place of the latter Conciliation Committees.

AGRICULTURAL COMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

On the assembling of Parliament in 1918, Mr. Pretyman, Captain FitzRoy and I took the initiative in forming a House of Commons Agricultural Committee with Captain FitzRoy as Chairman. That Committee has met regularly ever since, has considered and dealt with every agricultural question which arose, and I took an active part in all its proceedings and helped to make it what it proved to be—a most useful body.

REPORT ON AGRICULTURE.

At the end of 1921 and the beginning of 1922 the Land Union set up a Committee consisting of Mr. Pretyman, Captain FitzRoy and myself (Members of the House of Commons), with Lord Dynevor, Lord Desborough, Lord Hindlip and Lord Jersey (Members of the House of Lords), and some other gentlemen, to consider and report on the present condition of Agriculture. We made a very exhaustive Report in February, 1922, with a number of recommendations. This Report was considered and adopted in its entirety by the Agricultural Committee of the House of Commons, was presented to the Government, and many of its recommendations became law in the Finance Act of this year, including the remission of duty on Sugar Beet, the reduction of farmers' income tax to one year's annual value, and other most valuable concessions to owners and tenants as regards the repair and maintenance of houses and buildings including all agricultural property.

The recommendations in the Report with regard to Rating were under consideration when Parliament was dissolved.

The remission of duty on homegrown sugar is not only of importance in itself but establishes a precedent under which similar relief may be asked for in future in respect of other industries utilising agricultural products, *e.g.*, potatoes.

NATIONAL FINANCE.

In the Spring of 1920, I was appointed a member of the Select Committee of the House of Commons to consider the proposal to tax War Wealth. I was specially selected to represent the interests of Agriculture on that Committee.

LOCAL RATES (INCREASE PREVENTION) BILL.

I introduced this Bill in the Spring of 1921. It obtained a Second Reading by a good majority but unfortunately miscarried in Committee. It was again

introduced last Session at my request by Colonel Wheeler but, in consequence of the Dissolution of Parliament, did not get a Second Reading. The principle of the Bill having been approved, I am in hopes that the present Government will introduce and pass into law a somewhat similar measure.

LINCOLNSHIRE CHAMBER OF AGRICULTURE.

For ten years I have been Chairman of this Chamber, and have made a point of bringing forward for discussion by the Chamber every important matter affecting Agriculture coming before Parliament, and in any steps I have taken in the House of Commons I have endeavoured previously to secure the approval of the Chamber.

As Chairman of the Chamber I was able to secure from Lord Rhondda, the Food Controller in the War, a concession allowing cottagers having allotments to feed their own barley to pigs—at the time a concession very acceptable to agricultural labourers.

FINANCE ACT 1898. LAND TAX RELIEF.

Before I entered Parliament, as far back as 1898, I realised that the position of small owners of land and house property was unsatisfactory with regard to Land Tax. I drafted an amendment to the Budget of that year and Mr. Lawrence Hardy (Member for Kent) kindly introduced it for me. The then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Michael Hicks Beach, in course of the debate on it, accepted the principle of the clause and undertook on behalf of the Government to introduce a new clause to cover the points I had in view. This is embodied in the Finance Act, 1898, Section 12, and gives the same exemption or relief to small owners in respect to Land Tax as they have from Income Tax—a valuable concession to small owners and to farmers who have bought their farms.

VOLUNTEER FORCE.

In 1917, I was appointed County Commandant of the Lincolnshire Volunteer Force, having in the earlier part of the War served in the County Yeomanry. In April, 1918, I introduced a clause in the Military Service Bill imposing an obligation on men exempted from serving with the Colours to join the Volunteers. There was strong opposition to this clause in some parts of the House, and the Government hesitated to adopt it, although it was urgently needed to bring the Volunteer Force up to strength. Field Marshal Lord French was then responsible for Home Defence and the day my clause was coming up for consideration in the House of Commons, I interviewed him and subsequently wrote him this letter:—

“DEAR LORD FRENCH,

“You are aware that the Amendment I am to move in Parliament to-day imposes liability on all men between the ages of eighteen and fifty-one, who may be exempted from serving with the Colours, to join the Volunteer Force for Home Defence if and when called upon. It is important to know whether you, as responsible for Home Defence, feel any need for a measure of this character. I shall be grateful if you will let me have a reply which I may read if necessary to the House of Commons.

“Yours sincerely,

“E. ROYDS.”

I got this reply:—

“DEAR COLONEL ROYDS,

“In reply to yours of this date, I have no hesitation in expressing the opinion that the men in question are badly wanted, and will supply a most necessary help towards Home Defence.

“Yours sincerely,

“FRENCH.”

Both of these letters I read out in the House of Commons. In the face of so clear an expression of opinion from the Officer responsible for Home Defence, the Government gave way and intimated to me that

if I would have my clause moved in the House of Lords when the Bill came up there for consideration three days later, Lord Peel on behalf of the Government would accept it. I arranged with Lord Desborough to move my clause. It was embodied in the Military Service Act, 1918, and had the effect of greatly adding to the strength of the Volunteer Force and giving Lord French the number of men he deemed it necessary to have for the safety of the country.

When I told my friends in the House of Commons that I intended to press this clause, they replied that it would be an unheard of thing for any Government to make such a radical change on the initiative of a private Member. However, with the powerful assistance of Lord French's letter, I brought it about.

I think I may safely say that I have been personally concerned with every Bill passing through the House of Commons while I was a Member of it, dealing with Agriculture, Land, Housing, and kindred subjects, and that since the War, I have been a Member of every Committee dealing with Bills relating to these subjects, including Land Settlement Bill, Allotment Bills Acquisition of Land Bill, Housing Bills, etc., etc.

E. ROYDS.

STUBTON HALL,
NEWARK.
9th January, 1923.