



Building a Greater Britain

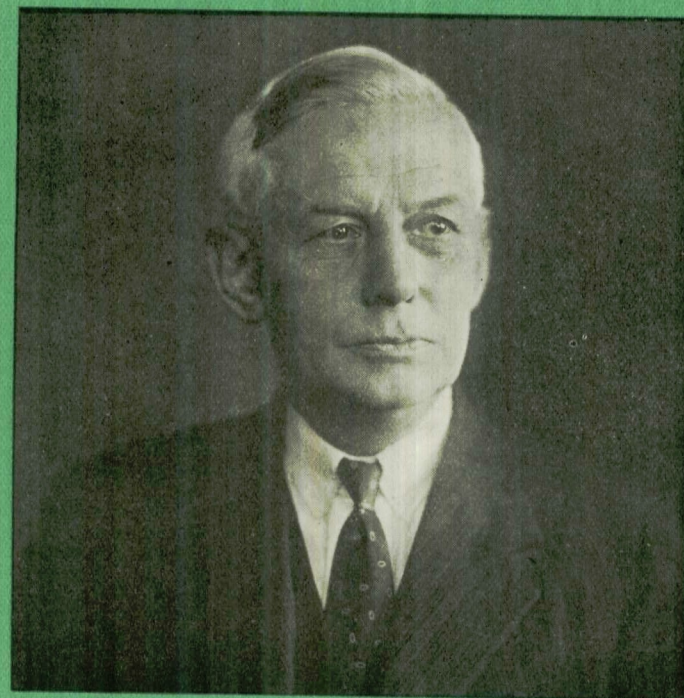
● The Labour Party has now set out in clear and practical terms its proposals for securing peace and prosperity. Along ten broad paths of achievement in a five-year plan of action, a Labour Government will lay the foundation of a just society, undertake urgent tasks of social amelioration, and build a stable peace system. Labour thus takes the initiative in the crusade to build a Greater Britain—to give the nation's citizens security and well-being. Labour's ally in the task of rousing public opinion with this challenging programme is the *Daily Herald*—the greatest of all national newspapers. The *Daily Herald* welcomes Labour's plan. Its far-reaching influence will be used to win approval for its aims. It invites men and women of goodwill to assist by persuading their friends and neighbours to read the *Daily Herald*—thus ensuring the entrance of Labour's message into yet more homes. By so doing you will be helping to win power for Labour's great plan.

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LABOUR'S POLICY FOR OUR COUNTRYSIDE



By
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Labour's Policy for Our Countryside

- NATIONAL OWNERSHIP OF LAND with
- FAIR RENTS AND FINANCIAL HELP
- GUARANTEED PRICES FOR PRODUCE through
- CONTROL OF IMPORTED PRODUCE and
- BETTER MARKETING OF HOME PRODUCE
- A NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE
- IMPROVED RURAL HOUSING
- BETTER WATER AND LIGHT SUPPLIES

LABOUR'S POLICY FOR OUR COUNTRYSIDE

by
Lord Addison.

THE BRITAIN THAT MIGHT BE

WE have a splendid countryside in this island home of ours. We all love it and are proud of it, although few are enabled to enjoy, as they would like, the good life it might afford.

If we were to set about making the best use of it in a sensible way we should soon be delivered from the shameful circumstance, that workers in the great and vital industry of food production are so badly paid and have such poor prospects that their sons and daughters look for opportunities, not of getting on in it, but of getting away from it.

It is absurd that it should be so. The advantages we possess are so remarkable. Just consider :

We have the best food market in the world within a short distance of every farm in the land :

We can produce such excellent live stock that men come from all parts of the world to buy it for breeding purposes :

We can grow many vegetables and fruits of the best quality, and much of our land is so rich by nature and favoured by our climate that its yield in crops and produce of all kinds is of exceptional abundance.

Ordinary reasonable people would expect that with these unusual advantages we should have an agriculture that was steady and prosperous, and that gave good employment to a large and perhaps an increasing number of people. The amazing fact is, however, that exactly the opposite is the case.

THE BRITAIN THAT IS

Fewer People on the Land

Year after year for a long time past the number of people employed on the land has diminished. Records available for Great Britain since the year 1921 show that in the year 1936 there were 77,578 fewer men working on the land than in 1930, and that in 1930 there were 102,505 fewer than in 1921. The fall in the number of workers has varied in different years, but always there has been a fall with the

result that **at the present time there are no less than 180,083 fewer men employed in agriculture than in 1921.** During many of these years too there was terrible unemployment in our towns, but the drift of young people from the country went on notwithstanding. The chief cause undoubtedly is that agricultural workers as a class are worse paid and worse housed than any others.

Less Land under Cultivation

It is no doubt true that in agriculture as in other industries, machinery has displaced many workers, but the evidence that this is not sufficient explanation of the fall in the numbers employed is afforded by the startling decline of the area of land under arable cultivation. In 1921 there were 14,967,303 acres of land in Great Britain under such cultivation, in 1931 the figure had fallen to 12,904,764 acres and in 1936 it had further shrunk to 12,095,761 acres. **The area of land under arable cultivation has therefore declined by nearly three million acres since 1921.** The records further indicate that about half of this has been put down to grass. Much good agricultural land has been covered with factory buildings, or has been taken up by house building and road widening. The remainder has just become derelict.

Side by side also with this decline in acreage the state of equipment of a vast extent of good land is increasingly deplorable.

The decline of the past few years is the more surprising when we remember the millions which the present Government has poured out as subsidies in one form or another. At the present time these subsidies certainly exceed £16 millions a year, apart from Agricultural Derating. As we shall see later a large proportion of these millions has never reached the farmer at all, but they have come out of the taxpayers' and consumers' pockets all the same.

Many People Short of Food

Any fair-minded person who compares these results with what he might reasonably expect must admit that a system that works in this illogical and disastrous way must be profoundly wrong. The wrongness of it has become more tragic now that it is established beyond challenge that there are millions of people—especially children and mothers—who do not get enough good food, and that the foods of which they are specially short are those which we are particularly well able to produce—fresh milk, butter, eggs and vegetables.

What is Wrong?

The success of agriculture must depend upon these two things :—

1. Making the best use of the land.
2. Ensuring a good standard of life to the cultivator.

The present system does not provide either of these. Why not?

FARMERS CANNOT MAKE THE BEST USE OF LAND

Take this first. The proper equipment of land for the purpose of good agriculture now depends upon the ability of separate owners to provide it. In the vast majority of cases they have not the means to do so and in multitudes of cases, even if they had, the present subdivisions of the land would make it impossible.

Drainage is Inadequate

For example: the proper drainage of the 1,755,000 acres of good land that are now water-logged and sodden and often productive of rushes and weeds instead of crops does not depend upon the ownership of this field or that. It depends upon the simple fact that water runs downhill whoever the fields belong to and must be dealt with as a whole as a practical engineering undertaking. **It can never be done whilst some can afford the expense of drainage and some cannot.**

Water Supplies are Inadequate

It is the same with water supplies. It is no exaggeration to say that whole districts in many parts of the country are only half-used because there is not a good water supply either for the people who live there or for the stock that could be raised. **An adequate water supply system cannot possibly be provided so long as it is dependent upon the means or the goodwill of tens of thousands of separate owners.**

Providence sends us plenty of rain, as we all know—yet year after year we endure the idiotic contradiction of damage by floods at one season of the year and damage by drought at another.

Farm Equipment is Inadequate

The provision of the different kinds of equipment that are necessary for good living and for convenient and efficient working of the land such as good cottages, farm buildings well designed and well drained, cow-sheds, piggeries and the rest are, it is true, within the power of individual owners if they had the means. But what do we find?

As we go about the country we come across well supplied home-steads and buildings here and there; but they are bright exceptions. **Taking the country as a whole, the cottages that agricultural workers have to live in are a disgrace:** the number of them that have good water supplies, good lighting and drainage is small, whilst leaking roofs and damp walls are only too common.

The area of farm land that is badly provided in the way of buildings and other equipment is measured in millions of acres. The reasons are well-known. The bulk of the owners cannot afford the cost.

Financial Burdens are Heavy

Take, for example, the case of what are known as *owner-occupiers*. The majority of the farmers who have bought their farms did so in times when land was dear. The previous owners, quite naturally as things are, took advantage of times of good prices to sell; and the tenant bought to keep his home and farm.

He had to borrow most of the money on mortgage and often had little or nothing left for working capital, much less for improvements in the way of new buildings. **The result is, that mortgages and bank overdrafts are millstones round the necks of thousands of such farmers. We shall never be able to get the land properly equipped for good husbandry so long as this system endures.**

The Labour Party believes that the Nation should take over the powers and duties which landlords have hitherto exercised, often to the detriment of the land, the farmers and the workers. It is only thus that the best use can be made of the land, the cultivator freed from the stranglehold of debt, and provided with the equipment and services necessary for efficient production, from national funds.

THE CULTIVATOR'S LIVELIHOOD IS INSECURE

Farmers cannot be Sure of a Return

Now take the second condition of successful agriculture, namely, that the cultivator should be able to rely upon obtaining a decent standard of life if he does his work well. This depends in the end upon fair and reliable prices being obtainable for good produce that the people want and are able to buy.

But at the present time, with few exceptions no farmer knows what he will get next year or next month or sometimes even next week, for his produce, and in any case what the consumer pays for the food in the town often is excessively more than what the producer receives.

He has all manner of fixed charges, such as rent, mortgage interest, transport and other costs to bear, but he has no certainty whatever as to what he will receive for his own produce, or have to pay for his feeding stuffs. He suffers from the vagaries of a system in which his own interests and those of the men he employs have neither voice nor influence.

Labourer's Wages are Inadequate

Agricultural wages are the lowest in the country and it cannot be otherwise under a system which operates upon the basis of:—

“Pay the producer as little as possible, and charge the consumer as much as possible.”

That is a wicked system.

If the producer has no surety of a fair price he cannot make the best use of the land he cultivates. If the housewife with her market basket is charged more than an efficient and justifiable marketing system would require, she can only buy less and so have her children insufficiently fed. If the labourers receive inadequate wages it is only to be expected that some of them will leave work on the land for more remunerative work.

Control of Prices and Wages Necessary

The Labour Party believes, that instead of producers' and consumers' prices being left to chance and market manipulations, we should institute a reasonable and humane system which aims at securing these two things:—

1. The emancipation of the farmer and the labourer from their present uncertainties as to what each will receive for his work and the establishment of a system that will secure a good standard of living for efficient producers, and which will make this the first element in the price of what they produce.
2. An adequate supply of produce to the people at no greater increase in price than may be required by an efficient and well-conducted marketing system.

No right-minded person wishes to buy a sack of coals or a sack of potatoes at the price of the starvation of the child of the miner or of the agricultural labourer. Equally, no right-minded person will deliberately support a system which needlessly increases the cost of the coals or the potatoes to the householder when the producer has not even been properly paid.

LABOUR'S PRACTICAL POLICY

THESE, then, are the main considerations underlying the Agricultural Policy which the Labour Party puts before the country.

In the short statement of Policy entitled “Labour's Immediate Programme,” the Party's intentions are set out in these words:

- “1. The land should belong to the people—and the use of land shall be controlled in the public interest.
2. A Labour Government will organise home production and will control Imports so as to ensure to the Home Producer a fair price for his produce and make available to all a plentiful supply of good food.
3. Sufficient and suitable food will be assured through Social Services for children and expectant and nursing mothers.
4. A living wage for the worker on the land will be the first charge on British Agriculture.
5. By a full use of Co-operative undertakings and Marketing Boards the present wide gap between what the producer receives and what the consumer pays will be narrowed.”

The Aims of Labour's Policy

The purposes embodied in these statements may be stated as follows—and, surely, they are right purposes.

1. That the best use should be made of land.
2. That the producer should have an assured place in the home market with a just price guaranteed to him for good produce that the land is suited to produce, and that he should be so protected from exploitation that he will be able to keep his production costs at a reasonably stable level.
3. That every agricultural worker should have such wages and conditions of work that he and his family will have a decent, free and happy life.
4. That people should be able to buy their food without paying unnecessary toll to the middleman and profiteer.
5. That the multitudes who are now ill-nourished should be able to obtain the good food we can produce or can supply in abundance.

But none of these things will happen of themselves. They can only be obtained by careful planning and by taking the powers necessary to give effect to the plan. They cannot come about under the system that has given us the present deplorable results.*

* A detailed statement on the administrative and other necessary arrangements is set out in the separate Pamphlet entitled “The Land and the National Planning of Agriculture.”

A National Agricultural Commission

Under the Labour Party's proposals, the final decisions on prices and the effective control of the safeguards designed for the help and protection of the producer and the consumer alike would be the responsibility of an independent and impartial national Commission.

This national Agricultural Commission, subject to the Minister of Agriculture and Food Supplies and the Cabinet, would have charge of the planning and direction of the whole scheme of agricultural development.

It is not necessary here to describe in detail the necessary administrative arrangements that would be required,† but the plan provides for the creation of

1. County Committees on which farmers, workers and other persons of experience would be represented; and which would be active local agencies to assist the Commission ;
2. Machinery for enlisting the aid which extended education and modern scientific knowledge can readily provide.

National Ownership of Land

It is impossible ever to secure the best use and proper equipment of land under the present system of multitudinous individual ownership crippled as it is by shortage of funds and by a thousand other obstacles. Under the present system also we cannot prevent the continuous disfigurement of the countryside or preserve its beauties for leisure and enjoyment.

Power therefore will be taken to transfer Agricultural land to public ownership.

It should be stated definitely and clearly understood that, apart from the land, buildings and houses belonging to the farms and necessary for their use, there is no intention or proposal to acquire any person's private house or garden.

Fair payment would be made to the present owners. Land would be paid for by the issue of National Securities to the amount of the purchase price justly determined, and the State, which would be guarantor for these National Securities, would acquire the freehold and all other rights in exchange.

The Labour Party is opposed to confiscation, and the prejudice which its opponents seek to foster by false accusations on this subject should be disregarded. Many thoughtful men of *all parties* have long been convinced that National Ownership is the only way by which good cultivators can be freed from the crushing burdens of rent,

† These are dealt with at length in the pamphlet "The Land and the National Planning of Agriculture," previously referred to.

mortgage interest, and other charges, and enabled to acquire good equipment, and thus be relieved of the anxieties and uncertainties which so many of them endure at present. Under Labour Government a farmer who does his work well need have no fear of disturbance.

Labour's plan is to help, not to hinder good productive work.

Fair Rents and Financial Help

A fair rent system would be established, for the land thus brought under public ownership, whereby unduly high rents for land which might require considerable expenditure for restoration purposes, would be avoided.

A National Land Account would be established into which all rents and revenues could be paid and through which the costs of development and interest services would be met.

The State would have the powers of landlord, to see that the best use was made of land, and the duties of landlord—to give the tenant-farmer every assistance in making the best use of his land, for example, by helping him, financially and otherwise, to improve his land and equipment wherever necessary; as well as the provision of good drainage and water supplies.

In addition, there would be set up State farms, large or small as experience might dictate: demonstration farms where the farmer could obtain the best advice: and co-operative methods would be encouraged.

Guaranteed Prices for Produce

Reliable prices for the producer and fair prices for the consumer can only be obtained under a system which is controlled for these purposes.

There are numberless instances in which Trusts and Trade organisations of different kinds control or fix prices in the interest of private profit.

What can be done for the purposes of profit by private concerns can be done by the Nation in the interests of food producers and food consumers.

It is only a matter of a National decision that it shall be done and doing it in a sensible and courageous way. It was done by guarantees for different purposes and in a variety of ways during the great war and in many parts of the world the same kind of thing is being done now. The success of the agricultural policy of the Labour Government of New Zealand is a conspicuous example.

The working of a reliable price system requires that there should be adequate control over the supply and marketing of the commodity concerned. Without it no system could work.

Control of Home and Foreign Supplies

A regular supply of food for the people is clearly vital **all the time** and the system must therefore be developed in such a way as will ensure that this is not interrupted.

It is therefore proposed that the control and management of the supply of the chief food commodities should be progressively undertaken.

In some cases, such as Milk and Potatoes, our supplies are mainly home produced ; in others, as in Wheat and Flour, we are mainly dependent upon imported supplies. The system therefore must provide for sufficient control over both Home and Foreign sources of supply.

Commodity Boards would be set up to provide this control to be for the different major food products, and power to control imports of these products would be taken.

These boards would not be independent but, **especially in regard to price policy**, would work under the general direction of the National Agricultural Commission.

It is abundance that we want, not scarcity : and it cannot be too strongly stated that Labour repudiates entirely the scheme that has been attempted by the present Government of bolstering up producers prices by inducing scarcity.

Labour's aim is to provide plenty for the people and to enable the home producer to produce his share of that abundance under decent conditions.

Control of Distribution

In order to achieve these ends and to do it in such a way as will continue to command public support **there must be adequate control of market operations and of distribution charges.**

The reason, for example, why the subsidy schemes of the present Government for beef producers have failed and why they have wasted millions of the taxpayers' money in a vain endeavour to secure reliable and fair prices for the home beef producer, is because the Government has refused to face the Socialism involved in the control of the market and distribution system.

An Example of Labour's Plan—Beef

The case provides **an interesting example** of the difference between the working of the present system, and what would happen under Labour's plan.

Under the present scheme the farmer has only got a fraction of the beef subsidy, and the customer at the shop has not benefited at all, and in some cases is worse off !

Under Labour's plan the cattle would be marketed through a publicly controlled abattoir system, and the producer would be paid the full value on the advertised price basis for what he sends, including his share of the value of the offals, which he now loses altogether. Through the operations of the Commodity Boards and Import Controls, an established price basis would apply to different grades of meat, and the customer at the shop would be safeguarded by means of a system establishing maximum distribution cost margins. It is the absence of both of these conditions coupled with an endeavour to uphold the present market system of haggle and uncertainty that has meant the unnecessary leakage of millions to unproductive middlemen between the Treasury and the cattle producer.

The scheme must be complete. The Marketing Act of the Labour Government in 1931 was meant only the first stage in the development of its policy. The difficulties that have arisen since are primarily due to the fact that the Government has not been willing to create the other necessary agencies.

The Act of 1931 was designed to secure the orderly marketing, by and on behalf of home producers, of their contributions to the nation's food supplies. It would have been followed by the establishment of associated Import Boards, of the national and local machinery for price management, and for the control of distribution charges as well as a national wages standard that would progressively rise as the system got into working order.

Instead of taking the necessary powers and creating the machinery required for the control of prices and distribution, the Government has allowed an unworkable patchwork system to grow up under which, in order to sell their produce, the Marketing Boards have had to be parties to the maintenance of the present unwarrantable costs of distribution and to undertake duties for which they are not fitted and were not designed.

So much is this the case that the Government has lately been condemned in the Report of its own Food Council for the year 1936*, which calls for an independent body to investigate costs and fix margins of prices.

A National Minimum Wage

It is the conviction of the Labour Party that a substantial as well as a continued improvement in the rate of wages as well as in the conditions of home life of agricultural workers, is absolutely necessary if they and their children are to be given hope and contentment.

* The Report by the Food Council to the President of the Board of Trade for the year 1936. Pages 22 and 23.

It is proposed that in order to give effect to the improved wages standards that would go with the plan, a National Minimum Wage should be prescribed by a national Wages Board and that the national minimum should rise progressively as the scheme came into operation.

The County Wages Boards would advise on local conditions, but they would cease to have the power to make final awards either on wages or hours—the final authority in these matters being the National Board.

Labour also aims at securing an annual holiday with pay for agricultural workers.

Improved Housing in our Countryside

The improvement of housing conditions in the countryside must proceed as a part of the improved equipment of the land.

The hardships of the tied cottage system would disappear with State ownership, but the safeguards of the Rent Restrictions Acts would be applied and alternative accommodation required before a family could be evicted. Most of all, however, the ample provision of good cottages for land workers would be undertaken by the Labour Government, and the scheme that was worked out in 1931 restarted and extended without delay.

Better Water and Light Supplies

The provision of adequate water and electricity supplies for farms and villages would be undertaken in a rational and comprehensive way and the piecemeal methods of the present Government superseded. (See Labour Reports on "Electricity Supply" and "The Land and National Planning of Agriculture.")

GIVE LABOUR POWER

The Labour Party believes that the time has come when, for the first time in the history of our race, we should combine together to make a full use, for the benefit of all the people, of the splendid inheritance that is ours. Our villages and country towns should be alert, prosperous places, full of industry and happy life.

They may be so if we will decide to free ourselves from habits and traditions that have become outworn, and be determined to adopt those methods whose necessity is manifest.

The need is urgent: the opportunity is great: there is abundance of skill, experience and goodwill waiting to be made use of. It is the decision of the people that is wanted.

SUPPORT THE LABOUR PARTY

"What the Labour Party wishes is to apply to the national life the same principles of commonsense and mutual aid that are applied in every good family."

—Rt Hon. C. R. ATTLEE, M.P.,
Leader of the Labour Party.

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