

in the case of houses, buildings, and other perishable property, and ten per centum in the case of land and other hereditaments, but shall in no case be less than five per centum of the value of the fee-simple thereof.

Precedents to be followed

These valuable precedents show how easily the recommendation of the Royal Commission can be applied, and that, even though rating as a whole is not placed on a land-value basis, there may yet be grafted on the present system a provision that will lay the axe at the root of a great evil.

THE CLASS STRUGGLE IN RUSSIA

An Uncompromising Land Programme

By H. N. BRAILSFORD, IN THE HERALD (LONDON)

The picture of Russia under the Revolution, which the telegrams suggest, is agitated, but it is also confused. The news shows us a world engaged in furious controversy, seething with suspicion, and oscillating between a kind of genial anarchy and a spasmodic assertion of authority. What the news fails to tell us, however, is the real reason for all this violent controversy. One hardly supposes that the Censorship conceals it; perhaps the correspondents in the midst of the struggle hardly realise our aloofness from it. The ultimate reason for the continued efforts of the Cadets, who now lead the anti-Socialist movement in Russia, to discredit the Revolution and upset the Provisional Government is something even deeper than their concern for the discipline of the Army or their lingering attachment to Imperialist war-aims. The ultimate question in Russia is the future of the land. The other issues, though some of them are genuine and important, have their significance chiefly as tactical details in a struggle which turns on something much more vital. The broad fact is that the Provisional Government has already proclaimed in principle the abolition of private property in land. We are used to academic declarations of that kind at Socialist Congresses. This, however, was a declaration made by a Government which has power in its hands. It was more than a declaration: it was a promise given in the name of all Russia to the peasant population. The execution of this promise is, moreover, under the charge of a man who is deadly in earnest about it. Ministers have come and gone, portfolios have changed hands, and to some extent the Cabinet has been diluted by the entry of non-Socialists, but M. Tchernoff, a Socialist-Revolutionary, remains at the Ministry of Agriculture. While he is there it is the definite and uncompromising land programme of his Party, which is being prepared for submission to the Constituent Assembly. . . . The middle classes then, if they are to save the principle of private property in land, must achieve one of two things. They may manage to upset M. Tchernoff in the hope of finding a successor who will present some much more moderate scheme to the Assembly. They may contrive to postpone the Assembly until after the war. They prefer indirect tactics, for the simple reason that peasant Russia is almost to a man behind the Socialists and their land scheme. On that issue a straight fight is for them hopeless. . . .

The Russians are an unsophisticated people who take

their theories literally. They really do propose to deprive all private owners of their superfluous land and to pay no compensation whatever for what is taken away. Their central principle is that every family which wishes to live by the land has a right to that amount, no more and no less, which a family can cultivate with its own hands. There is plenty of land to go round, and the system of farming is still deplorably primitive; families also are large. The average allowance for each family will accordingly reach a figure, startling to our Western notions, of from thirty to thirty-five acres. The big estates are to be pared down to this minimum, and if the former owner chooses to work with his own hands, he will keep this remnant of his property. What is gained by breaking up the estates of the gentry, the Church lands, and the Crown domains will be divided among the peasants or added to their present inadequate holdings. It will not, however, be their property. It will be theirs to use just so long as they cultivate it, but, apart from improvements, it will not be theirs to sell. The owner of the land will be the commune, or parish. Woods, a valuable form of property in Russia, will belong to the whole commune, or to a group of neighbouring communes. The principle is simple. The details are more complicated, but since I gathered them only in a hasty but most interesting conversation with a Russian expert, I will not trust myself to reproduce them fully. It is obvious that since land varies in fertility, and population in density, and since, moreover, many former peasants who are now in the towns and the Army will want to return to the land, an immense work will have to be done before the distribution is complete. The boundaries of the communes will have to be rearranged, and there will be considerable migration from the relatively congested to the relatively unoccupied areas. The grouping of communes by districts and counties will allow for the decentralisation of this enormous task. Property will be recognised in improvements, but not in the "prairie-value" of land, and that, of course, means that to some of the present owners some payments will be due. I do not know whether, in default of this, it is proposed to make any compassionate grant to former landowners, the aged, for example, who will be unable to till their own allowance of soil. So far as I can gather, any form of compensation for the land itself (apart from an owner's own improvements, which are not as common or as valuable in Russia as they are here) is thought to be impossible. The peasants neither can nor will pay anything, and, indeed, they have to a great extent occupied the land already, while the State, with its crushing war charges, its load of foreign debt, and its pitifully depreciated paper currency, is too near bankruptcy to assume the burden. Even on the assumption that an appreciable sum is paid for improvements (and apparently the average landowner cannot claim much on that score), and that some mercy is shown for hard cases, the proposal means revolution. We have all been thinking of the Russian upheaval as a political Revolution. It may leave industrial capital comparatively secure for the time being, but the land is by far the most important form of property in Russia. The Revolution is, therefore, for 90 per cent. of the population, a social as well as a political revolution. There are differences as to detail and theory among the various Socialist groups. The Social Democrats would transfer ownership to the State and would nationalise land. The Social Revolutionaries prefer to make it over to the commune or parish. The essential fact is that private ownership is doomed.

With this enormous fact, the abolition of private property in land, in the foreground of one's mind, it is possible to understand the present unrest in Russia. It is a social and not merely a political struggle that is going on, none the less deadly because it is fought so largely over side issues. . . . Is it wise, you ask, to force this issue? The Revolution has no choice. The peasants and the peasant soldiers will follow it only on this condition.