

This portion of the Bill is indeed a reiteration of the preposterous fallacy, which has secured currency all over the world, that the way to make people better off is to curtail the production of the very things that people require for their well being. If the destinies of nations remain in the hands of those who are capable of believing such things—or, perhaps, still worse, who put these ideas into practice without believing in them—then indeed the world is rattling back into barbarism.

By this Bill the Government has saved the royalty owners from making that contribution to the national revenue which might well have been required from them as from other owners of site values. It has helped to make other landlords feel themselves more securely entrenched in the enjoyment of unjust privileges, and it has set an evil precedent for the handling of the land question generally. These are serious injuries to the public interest of which the first will never be wholly repaired, and the others will require redoubled efforts to combat.

F. C. R. D.

## FLOOD PREVENTION: ITS COST

By Duncan Cuthbertson

MR. G. BRANSBY WILLIAMS, when addressing the Institution of Sanitary Engineers on 29th October, 1937, advocated a plan to prevent the flooding of the Thames and Severn valleys. He proposed that five reservoirs be constructed in the Severn catchment, and six in that of the Thames, and suggested that hydro-electric schemes might also be carried out.

He said :

"It is very difficult to make any reliable estimate of the cost. A large portion of it would be for the acquisition of land and properties and compensating vested interests.

"A rough estimate makes the cost of the schemes ; for the Thames, £7,400,000, and for the Severn, £10,650,000."

As regarded the Thames, the most important benefit derived would be to ensure an adequate water supply for London for as long a time as it was now necessary to look forward to.

These schemes are therefore estimated to cost over £18,000,000, but it was not stated how much of this amount is likely to be absorbed by the items "acquisition of land and compensation for vested interests," and how much will be required for the actual engineering work. Obviously, the work cannot proceed until the land has first been obtained, and, as things are, the vested interests bought out. £18,000,000 is a large sum, but if it is essential that the schemes are carried through, then some such expenditure will have to be made.

While no one can grumble at the cost of public works which are necessary for the well-being of the community, everyone is entitled to protest against millions being given to those who do nothing to further these works, but are in a position to block them until they have been sufficiently well bribed to stand aside.

Those who are unfairly rated or taxed to finance them are also entitled to protest—it is their duty, not only to themselves, but to the whole community, to do so. Unless, however, they can point out an alternative and just method of raising the money, and a way of stopping the blackmail, their outcry will be in vain.

The alternative method is not far to seek. If the

danger of flooding is removed there will be an immediate rise in the value of the land concerned. Therefore, could anything be more just than to levy a rate on land values ?

A rate or a tax would automatically prevent an excessive price being put on any land required, but not only that ; all the owners of land the value of which appreciated would pay in exact proportion to the rise, however caused.

If public works were financed in this way, many long-overdue works (such as the Charing Cross Bridge scheme) could be proceeded with. It is only the question of excessive compensation to those who claim rights to land which is now blocking them. When this obstacle is removed they will become economic propositions.

## OBJECT LESSONS

**York.**—Answering Mr W. T. Kelly in the House of Commons on 22nd November, Lieut Col Muirhead, Under Secretary for Air said that the claim by University College owners of the Langton Ouse estate, for 417 acres of land acquired by the Air Ministry for the new aerodrome, was settled at arbitration at a price of £32,787, but a question of law arising out of this arbitration had still to be decided by the High Court. He had no information as to the rateable value of the land, but as it was agricultural it was derated—which surely means that it had *no* rateable value ! The land that was worth £80 per acre was not assessed at all. Mr Kelly pointed out in his question that the College had demanded £43,626 for it.

**Llwchar U.D.C., Glamorgan.**—The Minister of Health, through Mr Bernays, the Parliamentary Secretary, informed Mr Grenfell in the House of Commons on 22nd November that he was making enquiries into the efforts the Llwwchar U.D.C. had been making to acquire an acre of land for the purpose of road making in Dulais Road, Pontardulais, but were not able to proceed because they found the landowner's price too high. He would ascertain whether negotiations had been resumed and was asked also to discover what was the rateable value of the land in question.

This case was reported in the *Herald of Wales*, 7th August. At a meeting of the Llwwchar Council, Councillor Tom Williams, of Grovesend, said : "There are people in Dulais Road who desire to charge the Council as much as £7,000 for an acre of land which is of no use to them and when the roadways are completed, their property will be enhanced."

**Notts. County Council.**—The conveyance of a site of about three acres for a senior girls' school on Beechdale Avenue, Sutton-in-Ashfield, at a cost of £2,650 was reported to the Council at the Shire Hall, Nottingham, on 2nd November (*Nottingham Journal* report). At the meeting, Mr C. Brown, M.P., said the site in question was quite agricultural three years ago. The price worked out at £900 per acre and he never knew, until he saw a previous case of land making this sum, that land at Sutton-in-Ashfield was so valuable. Why had they not approached the owner first instead of calling in the valuer and when he had valued the land, agreed on the price ? The Chairman said "sometimes it works the other way." How any one can express satisfaction in using £2,650 of public money to buy land at £900 per acre which was previously agricultural and therefore entirely free from rates, is a matter for astonishment.