

GROUNDNUT PLANNING

THE Government's groundnut plan in Tanganyika Territory continues to attract periodical attention in the Press. So far a sum of £25 millions of public money has been allocated to the scheme and there is no doubt that a great deal of administrative work has been done, including the building of offices, to quote *The Observer*, January 16th, "which would bring a smile of scorn or envy to the lips of the old time pioneers." Of the 1,230,000 acres under groundnuts foretold by Mr. Strachey for 1949, there are, however, only 23,000. No doubt some official explanation will be given, and the believers in planning—men and women by no means unintelligent—will remain as confident as before. Faith defies analysis. One recalls that many Banthu people still believe in the efficacy of *Mwabvi*, or the ordeal poison. According to them, if a person accused of a crime drinks *Mwabvi*, and survives, this proves his innocence. Although the absurdity of this belief has been demonstrated again and again, cases of the practice still recur. Faith is wonderful. And the Banthu, as a rule, are intelligent people, with a keen sense of humour. One who knows them would not be surprised to discover they refer to Planning as *Mwabvi wa Chizungu*, or the white man's ordeal poison.

A disturbing feature of this huge scheme is that it must have had an extremely disrupting influence upon native life in the vicinity and probably far afield. No reporter seems to have considered this aspect, and it would probably be dismissed with the remark that to bring so much (taxpayers') money to that country cannot do anything but raise "the standard of life." We assert, on the contrary, that no servant obeying orders, however well paid, can enjoy the same standards as an independent person developing his way of life according to the natural evolution of technical progress, an evolution which would never be concentrated to the extent artificial subsidies produce.

The occasion for this scheme was presented by the comparative scarcity after the war of animal and vegetable fats. According to the natural economy, respected—although never observed—before the days of great wars the scarcity of any article in demand would be reflected in a rise of price, and the price-rise in its turn would bring into profitable use a wider range of land and capital previously not used for the purpose, until a new equilibrium was established. For such a widely-used commodity as fat, without the expenditure of a penny of public money, the creation of political interests or the enactment of any coercive law, an immense number of people, the best qualified throughout the whole world, would apply all their ingenuity to remedy the shortage,

and the consumers and distributors would apply all their ingenuity to economising in use of the article or devising and supplying substitutes.

Previous legislators, however, overlooked two important considerations. If among the community there existed any considerable section living always on the verge of destitution, any rise, even temporary, in the price of a staple commodity would entail increased and possibly critical hardship. And if there was any hindrance to the use of land necessary for the increased production the readjustment would be delayed or even prevented from becoming established. In fact, both these factors were in operation, and both had their origin not in natural law but in the artificial private monopoly of land. Those deprived of this necessary element of their existence were and are obliged to live by selling their labour in a market in which they have no bargaining power. Workers with special skill or ability will and do draw a premium on these personal advantages, but those with no more than average skill will be and are driven down inexorably towards the subsistence level prescribed by the customs of the society in which they live. It is true that the full effect of this tendency is mitigated by the coercive action of the State, either by direct redistribution of income or by granting privileges to favoured groups of workers—and as a necessary consequence to the "capitalists" in those particular industries. This process corrupts society, but it can do nothing to prevent the constant pressure of economic law. On the other hand the owners of land required for increased production would, of course, demand increased rent, or even hold up their land in the expectation of a further rise. The owners of land previously in use would do likewise. Increased production might be temporarily checked altogether, giving rise to the symptoms of slump and "over-production," which recurred at approximately ten-year intervals even in the 19th century.

But throughout all this process the landowners of the community would remain the class with most leisure to develop powers of leadership and persuasion, including a kind of bribery that would become so customary as to be unconscious; and they would be of all sections of the community those most capable of saving money and partially monopolising capital. It would be remarkable if in such circumstances the dominant class was not able to divert attention from the ultimate source of its strength, and in this event it is only to be expected that the people should turn in desperation to worship the magic power of the cornucopian State and its Plans.

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During his recent visit to London, Mr. Ole Wang picked up a Norwegian book for reading on his journey. It was published by the Norwegian Club on the occasion of its 50th Anniversary in 1937. There, on page 40, on events in 1892, he was interested to read [translation]: "The ever-active Knudsen gave two more lectures this year. One of them, on January 27th, was on Henry George's book, *Progress and Poverty*. There was considerable discussion which was even continued at the meeting on February 4th."

The "Knudsen" referred to later became the late Sir Karl F. Knudsen. He was born in Norway in 1872. He was a prominent member of the Norwegian community in London, President of the Norwegian Chamber of Commerce, director of H. Clarkson & Co., of Hambros Bank, etc.

It is reported that the Northampton City Council has decided to purchase 32 acres of land with property at the back of Gold Street and Marefair, the purchase price to be £2,225,000, which works out at £70,000 per acre.

Alderman James E. Bugby, in a letter to the local *Chronicle and Echo*, of December 31st, made these observations: "I did not at the Council support the scheme. Neither did I speak against it, because seeing the Council had got its mind on the purchase, it would have been a waste of time and breath on my part. Further, seeing that this land in the year 1778 was part of the 840 acres of land known as the Northampton Fields, and enclosed without compensation or payment under the 1778 Land Enclosure Act, I could not as a good Socialist ask the Northampton ratepayers to buy land taken from their forefathers when they had no votes and no say."