

ACTION IN THE TRANSVAAL

South Africa's Independent News Review, *The Forum*, September 27th, in an article on "Anti-Democratic Laws," speaks with high appreciation of Mr. F. A. W. Lucas, K.C., and his public services as a lover of justice and freedom. The article refers to the Commission which the Springbok Legion of ex-Service men has set up. Mr. Lucas, Chairman of the Johannesburg Bar Council and at present an acting Judge of the Transvaal Provincial Division of the Supreme Court, is acting as President of the Commission, and has four colleagues who are prominent in public life. The Legion has asked for instances of a particular class or section of the community at the expense of the community as a whole; or to rob a section of the community of democratic rights which they as members of a democratic society should be permitted to enjoy; or to place in the hands of officials powers which should be exercised only by Parliament or the Courts. *The Forum* promises to publish later a summary of the evidence and the Commission's findings.

After a sketch of Mr. Lucas's career and in particular of his work in the course of land reform, to which he remains magnificently devoted, *The Forum* goes on to explain and to instruct its readers by interpreting Mr. Lucas's views on the subject. We quote these passages:—

"Land is the fundamental question in South Africa. By taking the full rental value of all land for the people, poverty and its concomitant evils of unemployment, slums, fear, dictatorship, racialism and war will be ended. That is the basis of his policy.

"South Africa has the natural resources and the manpower to provide what the country needs. The obstacle in the way is the power which the law gives to landowners to keep land out of use and to demand payment either in a purchase price or in rent, for permission to use it and produce what the people need. That price or rent is always the highest amount the landowner can extract; that, Mr. Lucas maintains, is the cause of poverty and unemployment and an oppressively high cost of living.

THE WAY OUT

"To remove that obstacle in the way of production we must make the right to use the natural resources of our country available to everybody, on equal terms, as equal heirs to the bounty of nature," he wrote recently. "That does not mean we want equal areas of land for everybody. All it implies is an equal share in the value of the right to use that bounty.

"We can attain that end by requiring everyone to contribute to the public Treasury the full annual or rental value of the land he holds and then to use the proceeds for public services for the benefit of all the people. If we did that it would be impossible to hold any land out of use and so there would be no unemployment in town or country or any shortage of necessities.

"Then, too, as the revenue from the value of land, urban, farming, and mining, would be sufficient to pay for all the public services we now receive and a great expansion of them, we could abolish every kind of taxation. This would bring down our cost of living and make the pound worth at least twice what it is now. It would also reduce our cost structure and so encourage the development of farming, mining and secondary industry."

"Land, Mr. Lucas contends, gets its value not from land-owners but from the presence and activities of people. Under his proposal there would still be complete security of tenure, and improvements and buildings would belong absolutely untaxed to the owner.

"Idle land is the cause of unemployment and low wages, of poverty and insecurity. To end those evils we must break the power of land monopoly to hold land idle. . . . God made the land for the people. Our laws have given it to a few landlords so that they may grow rich from speculating with it."

"In his book, 'South Africa As She Might Be,'* Mr. Lucas explains that because, under his proposals, everyone would have to pay to the State by way of land duty the full value of the land he occupied, no one would be able to use land he did not

use. He would gain nothing by holding it out of use. 'By requiring him to pay the land duty we should not take away his land, but we should make it too expensive for him to hold any land that he did not use.'

"Mr. Lucas is not planning a Utopia, but a land where the different sections can 'live at peace with one another and enjoy a reasonable degree of prosperity in which everyone can share.' Work, food, freedom for all—always. That is his slogan."

* Some copies are available at LAND & LIBERTY offices, price 3s. each.

A VIGILANT CORRESPONDENT

Mr. Mather Smith, Editor of *The Free People*, monthly journal published both in English and Afrikaans, was among those who submitted memoranda to the Commission, and in his informing evidence he quoted the statement on August 26th by General Smuts in Bloemfontein about the "amazing increase in land prices," who said: "If the mad career of these prices continues it seems that the young farmer of the future will begin with a mortgage burden that he will not be able to bear; I thought that in my position I should give this warning; land is becoming too expensive." Mr. Mather Smith referred also to the statements of Col. Stallard and Mr. Kentridge in Parliament and of Bailey Becker in the Transvaal Provincial Council about land speculation and land value taxation as the remedy. In his letters to the newspapers, of which we have no fewer than 17 recent cuttings—in the *Star*, the *Rand Daily Mail*, the *Sunday Times*, *Forward*, and *Barlow's Weekly*—Mr. Smith proves himself a vigilant and instructive correspondent. They are all topical, dealing with such questions as soil conservation, road taxation, rising costs, the tariffs, the builders' strike in Johannesburg, attitudes of the political parties and the trades unions, etc., and the opportunity is never missed to drive the "right lesson" home. The following quotations are worth putting on record:—

In the debates on the Budget, Mr. M. Kentridge, United Party, said, March 10th: "I would like to ask the Minister to consider the possibility of a land tax which will not hurt the farmer as it will only be imposed on the actual value of the land and not on development. It will be an encouragement to use the land to the best possible advantage and would eventually result in reducing the cost of land to the benefit of the farmer . . . and it would reduce the cost of living."

Colonel Stallard, Dominion Party, said, March 13th: "I want to deal with a source of revenue which has not been tapped and which should be tapped—the desirability of imposing a tax on the unimproved value of land. . . . It is impossible at present to get a decent return on the values of land as they are inflated at present. . . . You have only to go through the country in car or train to see what tracts of land could be converted into fruitful fields and which are lying bare."

Mr. Ivan Walker, in his Award of over three years ago to the building industry, drew attention to the "fantastic" profits made on the sale of land for building purposes and cited nine spectacular instances; the ever-rising cost of building land was a major factor in the rising cost of building; The *Star*, in a leading article on the subject, said: "Perhaps the most valuable part of Mr. Walker's document was his reminder that wages are not the only, nor even the greatest, factor in the cost of building, and his recommendation that the other items in the bill of costs, particularly the uncontrolled speculation in land, be investigated. Unfortunately, this and other constructive provisions have been lost sight of."

Welcome visitors to this country are Mr. F. and Mrs. Thyra Folke, of Copenhagen, and Dr. and Mrs. Paul Dane, of Melbourne. Mr. and Mrs. Folke have been spending some months at Woodbrooke, Selly Oak, and attending the course of lectures there. Mr. Folke was present at the meetings of the United Committee and the Midland Land Values League on October 18th. Dr. Dane is one of the speakers in the Liberal Liberty League's autumn session of meetings, his subject being "Australian Campaigns against Land Monopoly and State Control of Industry," National Liberal Club, S.W.1, at 6 p.m., on November 27th.