

Star in blatant headlines talks of the "Doom of Land Speculation." But is it the doom of speculation to pay the owners of land a speculative value? Is it not the reward of speculation? The owner will still be left in possession. He can reap every increase in land values which will accrue from the land in its present use, and this may be enormous—witness the difference between the site value of houses still standing in cities such as London and the site value with the identical building 60, 80 or 100 years ago.

If such a proposal is passed into law, it may well mean the payment of many hundreds of millions of pounds of compensation by the State with very little revenue in return. It will mean at this moment, when the demands of the transition from war economy are straining the nation's man-power to the utmost, an enormous amount of time wasted upon millions of claims and valuations, which cannot be settled on

any scientific principle and the ultimate determination of which will be of no value to the community.

No! What is wanted is a measure which will indeed eliminate land speculation, bring the price of land down to a reasonable level, provide the community with steady and immediate revenue, and encourage the development of land instead of sterilizing it indefinitely. All this could be achieved upon economically sound, and tried and tested, principles by means either of a uniform national tax on land values or by a general system of local rating on land values. If this were done the problem of compensation in the relatively few cases in which it was really necessary would be brought down to its true proportions.

If the Government proceed on the lines suggested so widely in the Press, the result will merely be frustration and failure,

AGRARIAN REVOLUTION IN EASTERN GERMANY

(From our Special Correspondent in Germany)

IN THE Russian occupied part of Germany (Saxony, Brandenburg, Mecklenburg and Thuringia) all estates of more than 100 hectares* were seized during the months of September and October, 1945. They were taken without compensation, whether or not the proprietors were Nazis or war criminals. The estates were subdivided into small holdings of a maximum of 10 hectares in exceptional cases and were given in ownership to small peasants, farm workers, small tenants, re-settlers and displaced persons. This took place not by any popular resolve or democratic act but at the command of the Russian occupation forces and under direction of the German officials appointed by them.

The execution of these revolutionary measures was marred by a complete lack of orderly control. Thus it happened in many places that the former estate owners were robbed by the land-hungry crowd; they were stripped of their personal belongings, of their food stores and their money; they were manhandled and sometimes beaten to death.

The newly created small farms are almost all without tools or stock. They offer such a poor chance of a livelihood that a number of the new settler-owners have had to be directed to the food offices and be supplied with ration books. Right into the winter most of the fields remained untilled just as they were left after the last harvest. As for the re-settlers and the displaced persons, their one concern is to have a roof over their heads without thought of doing any practical agricultural work.

By the end of November, 1945, the subdivision of the big estates had been completed. According to an official report, altogether 7,000 properties of more than 100 hectares with a total area of 1,648,888 hectares were apportioned, including 350,000 hectares of woods and forests. In total, 281,000 holdings were created and passed into the ownership of 59,000 land-poor people, 158,000 landless peasants and farm workers and 64,000 re-settlers. The size of the single holding is about 7 to 8 hectares and in some cases 10 hectares. Land-poor peasants who already had a hearth and home received only additions of 2 or 3 hectares. In exceptional cases the former large proprietors, if they proved to have been opponents of National Socialism or were recognised as exceptionally competent agriculturists, were able to retain from 25 to 100 hectares of their estates including buildings and part of their farm equipment.

These measures, falsely called "Land Reform" by the authorities, are in fact nothing other than a dictated and insufficiently conducted revolution in the conditions of land ownership. But in judging the events, there are circumstances not to be overlooked. It was imperative that shelter and

* One hectare equals 2.47 acres.

occupation be found for the hundreds of thousands of the fugitives who had lost all, especially for those who fled from the East and from the former German lands annexed by the Poles. Moreover, the break-up of the large estates and the settlement of them by a peasantry is an age-old and well warranted demand which many proposals made by the German Land Reform Union (Bund deutscher Bodenreformer) have aimed to fulfil. But the Land Reform Union would attain reform by legislative process, not a revolution by brute force; a reform affecting rights to land which would establish justice where injustice formerly obtained; which would not set up new injustices in place of the old; a reform in land taxation by taxing land values which would effectually prevent the concentration of land-ownership in few hands.

Nothing of this sort has been effected in Germany. Just as the Nazis repealed the land value tax where it had been in operation, namely in the small state of Anhalt, so they obstinately refused to apply it anywhere and now Land Value Taxation is never mentioned by any party. The great estates have been parcelled in a manner that lacks any basis of justice. There is not the slightest guarantee against conditions arising of small owners, where they fail in their enterprise, giving up and selling out sooner or later so that bit by bit the greater and the great landowners will purchase these holdings. That happening, it may well be that ten or twenty years hence the territorial landlordism, which has always supplied the military cast and has actively supported the Nazi regime, will be restored to power in Germany.

The German Land Reform Union has not thus far had any chance to raise its warning and expository voice. Several months ago it applied to the Allied High Command for permission to express its views but that has not been granted. It cannot therefore undertake any activity. Even individual land reformers cannot utter a word in the Russian zone since all newspapers and the radio are under the control of the Russian censorship. No line may be printed and no word dare be spoken on the radio which implies criticism of measures enforced by the Russian authorities. What the German Land Reform Union especially deplors is the corruption of the term LAND REFORM, popularised by the great leader the late Adolf Damaschke, so that it is misused to describe the present agrarian revolution which so many Germans disapprove, whereby also the true land reform itself falls into popular disrepute.

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