

as to the economic and social and industrial effects of alternative systems of taxation. By its method, its comprehensiveness and its competence, this investigation will be found to have rendered a most signal service. Its value is enormously enhanced by the fact of the ready assistance Mr. Cowan had from government and municipal departments and their officials. He had the advantage of their collaboration without stint, and their endorsement of his findings, in letters of approval from the highest quarters, are among the most impressive of the documentation he has brought with him.

Housing Subsidies

The Minister of Health has announced the new scales of subsidies to be given in respect of dwelling houses built by local authorities. The annual amount is much higher than ever before and the payments are spread over 60 years instead of the 40-year period formerly adopted. Two-thirds of the subsidy is to be paid by the State and one-third by the local authority. Hitherto the burden has been borne in equal shares. Where the price of land exceeds £1,500 an acre the subsidy is graduated upwards to take account of the high price of the land.

According to the Minister's statement the average amount of subsidy from rates and taxes is estimated at £26 a year per house or flat. This figure would represent more than the average pre-war cost of building a dwelling of the normal type involved. It is an indication of the terrific increase in costs and the inflation which has taken place. At the same time as the State proposes to subsidise the building of houses in this way, it is also countenancing the imposition of a tax on houses in the shape of local rates. Can our legislators not see the absurdity of this position? It seems almost impertinent to point out the obvious remedy.

Quicker to Buy but no Cheaper

The Acquisition of Land (Authorisation Procedure) Bill deals with certain technical aspects of the procedure for compulsory purchase of land. It also contains a power, to be available for a period of five years, enabling public authorities to enter upon the possession of land which is to be compulsorily acquired notwithstanding that the purchase has not been completed. This power is somewhat similar to one contained in the Housing (Temporary Accommodation) Act, 1944, which authorised local authorities to enter upon land before purchase for the purpose of erecting temporary factory-made houses. The Bill may be a useful piece of machinery at the present time. It does nothing, of course, to meet the major difficulty of the high price of land.

In the debate on the second reading, Mr. Aneurin Bevan gave some examples of landlord obstruction. In Aspatria, in West Cumberland, a factory of 33,000 sq. ft. costing £36,000 to employ 156, was approved in July last year, but the Board of Trade had only just obtained owners' agreement to the district valuer's price. In Maesteg, South Wales, a factory of 14,000 sq. ft. costing £14,000 to employ 250 was approved in September. The Board had still not obtained the land. The same was the case with a factory at Pontypool of 23,000 sq. ft. to employ 250. He gave other instances to show how "the existing procedure is quite inappropriate to modern economic developments" and to justify speedier powers of acquisition. But surely that is not the moral. Landowners have been standing out *for a price*. The legislation that is wanted for loosening the hold of the monopoly is not a quicker dip into the public purse to buy it out but taxation which will "burst it," reducing the price, making landholders of such land eager and anxious to find a user or use it themselves, opening the way to production and employment—the Taxation and Rating of Land Values.

Argentina Land Problems

The problem of the great estates cultivated by a landless peasantry appears to be coming to the forefront of Argentine politics. Colonel Juan Peron, during his tenure of office last year as vice-president, established a land reform department of which he made Mr. Antonio M. Molinari the executive chief. Mr. Molinari is well-known as an advocate of land value taxation and as editor of *Nueva Argentina*, a monthly journal which gave much prominence to this subject. So far as our present information shows, the activities of the Land Reform Department do not appear to have gone beyond purchasing a number of large estates, breaking them up, and settling landless agricultural workers upon the new holdings on easy terms. The Department publishes a popular paper, called *Hombre de Campo*, to explain its views and policies. In the issue of November 29 last in an article on Agrarian Problems in the National Press we read: "By necessity the chief agrarian problem in our country and today is that of an equitable distribution of land. Cultivation of land by the owner implies the elimination of very large estates, the vast areas of which cannot be the object of individual care; implies greater efficiency in cropping; implies abolishing tenancies of oppressive hardship; implies 'making land an object of industry and not an object of rent.' Because of all this we can consider ourselves justified in taking this as the essential problem, as we so often find it in various forms in the columns of the Press. Under the same heading we include also the many references to taxation reform, the first conscious effort since the emphyteusis of Rivadavia to take up the march towards solving the problem."

Rivadavia was President in 1826 and established a system of land tenure called by the Roman name of emphyteusis. The land was held under a perpetual tenure, but unlike the Roman tenure, the rent was to be revised at periodical intervals so that the full economic value of the land should go to the nation, but the tenant would have full security of his improvements and would not be rented on them. This most enlightened system, which would have saved Argentina from subsequent troubles, was swept away when the dictator Rosas gained power, and the national lands were distributed with a lavish hand to his followers—hence the great estates under which Argentines groan to-day.

The reference to Rivadavia and to taxation in the article quoted may, therefore, be significant. Colonel Peron is now candidate for President. He has been much abused in the Press of his own country, and of the U.S.A. and this country. Is it because he threatens the landlords with whom the Press lords are friendly? Or is it true that he is of a fascist disposition, and a mere demagogue? In short is he a Rivadavia or a Rosas? The further development of this drama may be interesting.

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