

AT THE IRISH CONFERENCE—RESOLUTION AND DISCUSSION

On another page we report the Paper on Land Value Rating read at the Conference of the Association of Irish Municipalities held at Killarney, September 18-20, 1946.

The Conference was attended by some 70 delegates from local authorities in Eire. The reading of the Paper was given a very generous reception, no fewer than thirteen delegates taking part in the discussion after a vote of thanks had been moved by Councillor F. PHILLIPS (Cashel), and seconded by Alderman M. J. HARTNEY, ex-Mayor of Limerick.

Mr. A. POWELL, Town Clerk of Cobh, moved, and Mr. R. DE BARRA, Town Clerk of Mallow, seconded a resolution in the following terms, which was carried unanimously :

“That the new Executive of the Association examine the question of the Taxation of Land Values on the basis of (1) cost involved as the question of a general revaluation appears to be necessary ; and (2) the effect on local taxation ; and that we empower them to take such action as they may be advised.”

Alderman W. FURLONG, T.D. (Member of Parliament), Cork, said he was arranging a meeting between the Lord Mayor of Cork and Mr. Madsen on the latter's return journey to England.

Mr. PHILLIPS, in his speech, said that the cause of equal rights to the use of land had ever appealed to the Irish people, and he called James Fintan Lalor and Michael Davitt to memory. Alderman HARTNEY said he had read much of the literature circulated by the United Committee, and was greatly impressed by it. Alderman W. JONES, Mayor of Waterford, said his town had requested the Government to carry out a revaluation (for rates as now levied), but it had resulted to their dismay in some people having to pay more in rates who they thought were already paying sufficient, so that revaluation “had its dangers.” At the same time he instanced the expenditures incurred upon land drainage which had made a present to landowners in increased prices for land. Other speakers included Mr. O. I. FLANAGAN, T.D., Mountmellick ; Mr. J. O'CONNOR, Chairman of Tuam Town Commissioners ; Mr. YOUNG, Fermoy ; Mr. CARMODY, Town Clerk of Ennis ; Councillor P. CUNNINGHAM, Dundalk ; Councillor M. HUGHES, Sligo ; Councillor O'DONOGHUE, Naas ; Councillor J. FLYNN, Mayor of Sligo and Mr. SEAN MACCATHMAHAOIL, Town Clerk of Bray and Secretary of the Association, who mentioned the lead that the London County Council had given to the municipal land values movement by the Site Value Rating Bill which it had introduced in Parliament, but which under a Speaker's ruling could not go forward.

Replying to questions, Mr. MADSEN said revaluation was a “danger” only under existing conditions. Under the system he advocated those who made the best use of land would not suffer and would not have buildings or improvements taken into consideration.

Dublin papers gave useful reports of the proceedings. The *Cork Examiner* printed a large part of the Paper, and that publicity was supplemented by the Editor himself engaging in the discussion with a long leading article in critical mood on the Taxation of Land Values “that very old proposition which was revived at the Killarney Conference.” Contending that it has proved “unacceptable” and “unworkable,” he made Henry George and his theories a whipping boy, and declared that before the author of the paper at Killarney had a hearing at the Cork Corporation, the members of that body should procure and read and digest Henry George's works, and then say whether they are prepared to support the Taxation of Land Values and scrap all tariffs and subsidies. The Editor was thanked for this advertisement and recommendation, and his contentions against T.L.V. were answered in a letter which he was good enough to publish.

INEQUITABLE AND OUT-OF-DATE ASSESSMENTS

Basically the standard on which the rates are levied, and are payable by the occupier, is the same as that in England and Wales, namely, it is the rent, subject to certain deductions, which any property will command if it is let for a year in its existing condition. But in Ireland there has been no general reassessment since 1866, and this “poor law valuation,” as it is called—corresponding to “net rateable value” in England and Wales—is the responsibility of the Commissioner of Valuation whose department is centred at the Ministry of Local Government.

In Ireland they have no local assessment committees as in England and Wales, so that local authorities can do nothing but accept values established in 1866, and the only changes made are those which affect new buildings or structural alterations which are entered in the P.L.V., the assessment also being used for income-tax purposes. It is a system which is peculiarly savage upon any improvements, and apart from that, because assessments generally are so out of date, it is wholly inequitable as between one property and another. As to “uncovered land,” which is the description applying to agricultural land, it appears that its assessment dates back to the years 1849-51, when it was valued with reference to the average prices during those years of the several articles of agricultural produce. And “agricultural grants,” not, however, going so far as the Derating Act in England and Wales, give reliefs in respect of agricultural land which still further result in passing the rent or value of land into private pockets. It is little wonder that the rates in the £ reach in Ireland very high figures, as 25s. in the £ in Cork, and up to 35s. in the £ in other places, and this tax hits most heavily every effort in the way of building development. Local authorities cannot control the assessments. If they desire a general reassessment they have to apply to the Government, and the quoted experience of Waterford sufficiently shows that so long as the present *standard* of rating remains there is reason on the part of the local authorities to be very hesitant in the matter.

Seized with these views, the Association of Irish Municipalities, with the impetus Mr. MacCathmahaoil has given to the discussion, has repeatedly ventilated the Rating of Land Values. Papers on the subject were presented to the Annual Conferences in 1937 and 1940 by Mr. F. C. R. Douglas, and copies, as of the recent Paper, were widely circulated throughout Eire. Large quantities of the literature published by the United Committee have also been distributed. At its Conferences in Bray, 1936, and in Galway, 1938, the Association passed resolutions requesting land value legislation from the Government ; and (showing how the chaotic state of the present assessments is generally admitted) the Finance Minister in his Budget Speech, 1938, said : “The rateable valuation of the country, particularly in the urban areas, stands on an extremely conservative basis, and on the whole no longer fairly represents the commercial values of the hereditaments which constitute the basis of local government finance. This is a situation for which an early remedy must be sought, for it operates to cripple the finances of the local authorities and to impair their credit.”

ADMITTED NEED FOR REFORM

An *early* remedy ? Eight years have passed, and there is no legislative progress to report. A new Valuation Bill was introduced, and received a second reading on March 1, 1939, by 67 votes to 51, but its place is not yet on the Statute Book. When the Bill was before the Dail, the United Irish Leaseholders' Association, under the competent leadership of Mr. Owen Mulholland, pressed for a provision requiring that the annual

site value of every holding apart from buildings should be ascertained and entered in the valuation rolls. On February 24 of the same year, the Rev. J. E. Canavan, Chairman of the Citizens' Housing Council of Dublin, at a meeting of the Social Enquiry Society of Ireland, urged the view of people interested in slum clearance that the raising of a rate on site values should be seriously considered by public authorities. "It could be done within the framework of the constitution; it taxed only the wealth which came from the efforts of the community, and did not tax wealth that came from the efforts of the individual."

At the Ard-Fheis (annual convention) of Fianna Fail, the Government party, on December 3, 1935, Mr. Erskine Childers voiced a plea for a Land Valuation Bill which would show the value of land apart from improvements. Addressing the National Town Tenants' Association a few days earlier at Westport, Co. Mayo, he said that Land Value Taxation was the remedy for the grievances of town tenants. In the Dail, on February 7, 1936, Mr. Richard Anthony, Independent Labour T.D. for Cork City, moving a resolution formally seconded by Mr. Morrissey, Tipperary, made a full and able statement on the justice and urgency of Land Value Taxation. The House, however, adjourned without taking a vote. We should also take into this record the resolution of the National Convention of Leaseholders' Associations at Cork on July 31, 1936, and the statement of the Labour Party on "Taxation of Site Values" in its pamphlet, *Planning for the Crisis*, which it published in April, 1940—although the former related specifically to the taxation of undeveloped land at its full site value, and the latter to abolishing the anomaly which enabled owners of ground rents to escape paying their due share of local taxation. The declarations were incomplete in not calling for the rating of all land values, but their importance was in making sentiment against the injustice of the present system. Mr. Eamonn Ginnell, hon. secretary of the Leaseholders' Organisation, acknowledging literature received from the United Committee, wrote: "As far as this country is concerned, there is still a land question. Legislation has been for one class of tenant—the agricultural tenant, and the towns and cities are as the rural dwellers were sixty years ago . . . progress is doubtful on any other lines than those in your policy." The Labour Party, in its statement, said, "Apart from the large sums which are exported annually from this country in respect of existing ground rents, every day new ground rents are created by private interests taking advantage of the enterprise of the local authorities without a penny-piece reverting to the bodies responsible for maintaining, out of public funds, the amenities of the property and enlarging its profit-making potentialities."

One of the speakers at the Killarney Conference, Mr. A. Powell, the Town Clerk of Cobh, said that the Paper submitted to them proposed a revolution in local taxation, but they were not afraid of revolutionary measures. The Irish were pioneers, and what had been achieved elsewhere they could undertake. That sentiment certainly prevailed at the Conference. The more that the Association can do to promote it among their constituent local authorities the sooner shall we see the practical adoption of the reform. And the Irish Government has the opportunity not only to give its country the enormous benefits that will come thereby, but also to show a lead and a lesson to the rest of the world.

No man can legitimately claim possession or occupation of any portion of land or any right of property therein, except by grant from the people, at the will of the people, as tenant of the people, and on terms and conditions made or sanctioned by the people; and every right except the right so created and vested by grant from the people is nothing more or better than the right of the robber who holds forcible possession of what does not belong to him.—James Fintan Lalor.

GERMAN PRISONERS AND HARVEST LABOUR

"E. A. B.," of Notts County, who contributed the article on "The Tramp" in our previous issue, writes: "The tramp has been given a job on my neighbour's farm. This farmer tells me that they employ German prisoners to assist with the harvest, and reveals a peculiar situation in relation to labour for the harvest. The Germans receive letters from home telling how desperate is the food situation. They were told that in this country the harvest needed extra labour, and that if it was not forthcoming it was unlikely that German families would receive any food; it would all be needed here. The prisoners volunteered to work on the farms, therefore, and understood that they were not being repatriated because their efforts would be needed here. During this harvest, a camp containing 500 prisoners has not sent out more than 200 at any time, so the men are asking why they must stay here. In the fields the men work well, although most of them had been professional workers. They did not mind blisters.

"Now, there is a scheme whereby the Ministry of Agriculture supplies squads of unemployed to assist in harvesting. An organiser person tries to tempt farmers to take them on. The farmer pays by the hour, and should the weather be unfavourable, the men go home and what they have earned is made up to £4 2s. 6d. for the week. The men, as a rule, are unsuitable in physique to do the heavy lifting entailed in loading, stacking and threshing, which means that the heavy work falls on the regular farm labourers, whose minimum wage is less than the £4 2s. 6d. This leads to unhappy working relations.

"The lot of the squad member is not devoid of its moments of pleasure, for as soon as rain stops work, their pleasure is unbounded—they go home and draw their pay just the same. Truly this state of affairs is chaotic. Through it all one sees the individual treated as a unit of labour, but his reactions are those of a human being, and will not fit in with the plans."

VANISHING SILVER

In a world of "managed currency" it will cause little stir to learn that in Britain's coinage silver is to go the same way as gold. Just as the "promise to pay one pound" which appears on the pound-note has become a meaningless formula, so the phrase, "Would you like it in silver?" will become, if it lingers at all, merely a courtesy term in the banks. Since 1920 all new silver coins have in fact been merely semi-silver coins of different alloys, mainly tarnishable in wear, and alike only in their 50 per cent. of silver. The new coins to be expected in a few months will be cupro-nickel, which may, one must hope, have at least as good an appearance and offer at least as much difficulty to the forger.

Technically, it may be said, the currency is being further debased, with the same object which many Governments in history have pursued, of creating a profit for the Treasury. By withdrawing the existing coins some £75,000,000 worth of silver borrowed in kind from the United States during the war can be repaid at small cost. The present shilling costs in metal over fivepence; the new one will cost only a decimal of a penny. A token coinage such as we possess is, properly considered, merely a durable form of banknote, and there is no logical reason why it should not be made less expensive to produce, provided it serves its purpose and has some dignity.

—Daily Telegraph, September 28.

IN THE LIVERPOOL AREA

The two economic classes being held under arrangement with the Local Education Committee and conducted by Mr. Cecil Craig, B.A., commenced on September 23 and 24. One meets every Tuesday evening at the Waterloo Grammar School, Cambridge Road; and the other every Wednesday evening, at the Great Crosby Secondary School, Coronation Road.