

## CONSERVATIVE AGRICULTURAL POLICY

(Reprint, with acknowledgments, of a letter by Mr Alfred Beesly in the "Manchester Guardian," of 28th February.)

FOR SEVEN years we have been blessed—or cursed—with a Conservative Government which boasts that it has done more to benefit agriculture than any previous Government. It is quite true that it has poured out more public money on agriculture than ever before. Consider some of the things towards which the money has gone.

There has been money for beet, wheat, oats, barley, hops, milk, potatoes, cattle, pigs; money to cut bracken in Scotland, to rebuild the cottages necessary to house the labour upon which farm profits and rents depend, to renew the plantations sold at high prices to the public during the war, to pay the rates from which agriculture has been relieved, to fertilize the land (which belongs to private owners) with lime and basic slag. Nobody knows the exact cost, but that great agricultural authority Sir Daniel Hall, speaking at the British Association last summer, put the figure at £40,000,000 a year—direct and indirect. I have heard other authorities put it much higher, but perhaps to avoid all possible controversy we may be content to accept Sir Daniel's figure.

And what has been the result of this enormous expenditure of public funds, this extraction of money from the pockets of the rest of the community in order to provide profits for a particular class? If it had made agriculture prosperous many people would have considered it worth while. But we hear on all sides that farming is to-day facing the greatest crisis in our lifetime. That is the point to which seven years of Conservative government has taken us—seven years of mess, muddle, and incompetence. It has all brought us to the greatest crisis of our lifetime. We are told that it is the method of trial and error. There is certainly plenty of error about it.

And what is the remedy which it is now proposed should be applied by the very same people who have been responsible for the sorry pass in which agriculture now finds itself? There is to be more money for sheep and a standard price (which, of course, means a higher price) for all cereals. How much more money is that going to cost, and who is going to pay it? Will anyone tell us? With the Budget unbalanced, grinding taxation, vast expenditure on rearmament, depreciating sterling, depressed exports, and derelict areas, nobody ever mentions the cost, but it will have to be met. And after these muddlers in the Government have finished with it, what prospect is there that they will have been any more successful than in the last seven years?

Government activities have, however, been devoted to other things relating to agriculture than the payment to it of other people's money. They have taken care to extend their methods of trial and error in other directions also. How much of that £40,000,000 a year has remained in the pockets of the farmers? Having first filled the farmers' pockets the Government has then picked them. The price of almost everything a farmer must buy has been bolstered up by the policy of Protection, which has brought utter disaster to our shipping, our exports, and our distressed areas. If sellers in any part of the world are willing to provide our farmers with cheap machinery, implements, galvanized iron, wire, netting, bricks, cement, girders, nails, screws, tools, piping, feeding stuffs, coal, transport, boots, shoes, or other articles of clothing, the Conservative Government has taken care so to arrange things

by means of tariffs, quotas, regulations, and controls that it cannot be done. Farmers complain that wages are much higher than formerly. How can that be helped if the cost of everything a farm-worker has to buy is artificially raised? He would be better off with less wages if his money went farther.

Forty millions a year; and that is not enough! Must it really be more; far more? How long do farmers think that the rest of the community is going to stand it? Is that a sound basis on which to build the prosperity of agriculture?

And that is not all. It is to be a condition that farmers must submit themselves honestly to whatever control may be necessary. Whose control? Why, of course, the control of those very people whose methods have reduced agriculture to a condition of the greatest crisis in our time. A cheerful prospect indeed!

### THE SURVEYOR IS WITH US

A correspondent gives us from his files the following extract from an article by "W. H. E." in the *Surveyor* of 6th January, 1939, writing on the Estimation of the Cost of Acquiring Land and Buildings:

Situation is of paramount importance in determining the value of land. A few square yards in the West End of London may be worth thousands of pounds whilst a similar area in the heart of the country would not fetch as many pence. Land in the centre of a city has great potentialities for producing income for commercial purposes and, therefore, has high value. . . .

Land forming building sites in business areas of towns is commonly valued at so much per square foot or per square yard. Land immediately adjoining a busy street has a much higher value than land further back from a business point of view. A deep site with a short street frontage is generally less valuable than a shallower site with a longer street frontage. Deep sites are often valued in stages or "zones" at different distances from the street, the zone nearest the street being the most valuable and those behind it decreasing in value very rapidly per unit area the further they are from the street.

Building land for houses fronting roads is commonly priced in terms of "foot frontage," the price per foot being governed to some extent by the depth of the plots. . . . Prices per foot frontage vary enormously, depending upon the situation of the land and the demand for building land in the district. Building land fronting a public highway carrying sewers and other public services is much more valuable than similar land fronting private streets or unmade roads with no public services. The presence or absence of various services should always be ascertained before attempting to fix a rate per foot frontage for building land.

The matter could not be put better. On their own ground, the Surveyors and Land Agents argue quite brilliantly, if often quite unconsciously, for the principle and the policy of Land Value Taxation.

Mr Rogelio Casas Cadilla writes that Mr Jesus Paluzie Borrell of Barcelona, a zealous follower of Henry George, is in a concentration camp at La Tour de Carol, France. Mr Casas would like the circumstances of this good fellow to be known so that any sympathetic co-workers in the Henry George movement might assist him with food or the means to purchase it.