

To Labour Mayors and Party Leaders.—The London Labour Party (Mr. Herbert Morrison, Secretary) has sent out a municipal circular letter to Labour Mayors, Party Leaders and Chief Whips—for Party meeting or Finance Committee—directing attention to resolution on the local rating of land values as reported in our March issue. The letter is headed Labour and Municipal Finance, and declares:—

Labour says that the only hope for the working and lower middle class ratepayer is to find additional sources of local revenue. We want to put the burden on the shoulders of those best able to bear it—that is why we are not liked by the Municipal Reformers. The following is an indication of one of Labour's remedies for high rates.

Here follows the terms of the Poplar Borough Council Resolution referred to above. The London Labour Party at the Borough elections of 1919 stood for "the rating of land values and no dodgery." This circular letter to the Party Leaders is a piece of good spade work, which must be bettered if the Party would make good at the elections next year.

The Failure of Land Settlement Schemes.—The relation between the land question and unemployment is clearly seen in the facts presented in the recently issued annual report of the Scottish Smallholders Organization Society. The report states that the number of applications for land was officially stated recently to be 15,000, of which about 5,000 are from ex-Service men. How is this colossal demand being met? With regard to civilian applications, it is certain that little or nothing has been accomplished, because, quite properly, preference is being given to ex-Service applicants. Of these, only about 600 have been as yet settled or nominated for settlement, although some hundreds more will probably be settled by Whitsunday, 1921. The prospects of the remaining 3,000 or 4,000 ex-Service men—to say nothing of the 10,000 civilians—receiving holdings within a reasonable time is so remote that applicants in large numbers have abandoned all hope. A mere expectation—and highly problematical at that—of getting a holding in four or five years is of no value to an ex-Service man who has lost his livelihood owing to the War, and who has to make his living in the meantime. Numbers of ex-Service men, including many disabled men, who completed training in agriculture under Government schemes, are still without holdings, and have had to drift into other employment.

The same story of delay and disappointment comes from all over England and Wales. More than 650,000 acres have been applied for by ex-Service men. Twelve thousand of these men have withdrawn their applications or "have been rejected as unsuitable." More than 26,000 more remain on the waiting list. These facts emerge from the official return issued by the Ministry of Agriculture. Questions asked in Parliament last month allege that in Bedford land agents claim excessive compensation, and fight every reasonable endeavour to secure land; that in Bedford large areas of land are being sown down to grass and rural unemployment is increasing at a rapid rate; that in Lancashire application was made for a piece of land in July, 1919, and in January, 1921, the County Council reported that negotiations were still in progress; that in Cumberland the matter of exercising compulsory powers for acquiring land at Seascale has been the subject of correspondence for a whole year. To these questions the Ministry of Agriculture replied with answers giving little satisfaction.

But what of the unsatisfied applicants? They swell the army of unemployed, or they emigrate from the land where they are denied the right to live.

A Notable Admission.—Colonel Sir R. Sanders (Lord of the Treasury), answering a question in the House of Commons on 21st March, said that:—

Many ex-officers and men were completing their

courses of training under the agricultural training scheme and that a sufficient number of small holdings were not available at present to provide for all of them. "I would point out," he said, "that the agricultural training scheme was not designed to provide applicants for the small holdings to be created under the Land Settlement Scheme. The number of fully qualified ex-Service men who applied for small-holdings was greatly in excess of the number of holdings that could be provided for some time, and accordingly the applicants for training have frequently been told that no guarantee could be given that holdings would be available for them on the completion of their training, and that if they desired to farm on their own account they should endeavour to obtain land for themselves."

This is the Ministerial comment on the Government schemes of land settlement by land purchase and bureaucratic control. The land is not available for men trained in agriculture at the public expense, not to speak of the many thousands of already competent and willing men who are looking for a chance to use the land. It is not that the opportunities are limited. They are there in abundance, but the Government will take no steps to force the monopolists to let go.

Against Advocating any Definite Policy.—Mr. W. R. Smith, M.P., President of the Agricultural Workers' Union, contributes an article to the NINETEENTH CENTURY of March on "Labour and Land," in which he declares that the problems of agriculture cannot be dealt with successfully unless and until the nation gets control of the land essential for the industry. He argues that the land should become the property of the nation, and points out that the Labour Party, having this aim in view, is clearly not united on methods. We look in vain through Mr. Smith's article for any guidance. The method of securing the land for the people, of encouraging its best use and assuring to each worker the just distribution of the produce of labour, is surely all-important. Mr. Smith talks of ideals, and says that if the main considerations are kept in mind "the discussions as to the relative merits of confiscation, land bonds, taxation of land values, and annuities become of secondary importance, and the possibility of the introduction of one or other of them becomes dependent on the teaching of experience and thought-development among the people, which is daily going on. It is for these reasons that we do not advocate that a Trade Union, organising agricultural workers, should pledge its support to any nationalization scheme, and it is for these reasons that we do not see anything to regret in the existence of considerable diversity of opinion among members of the Labour Party on this question." Of course, the possibility of the introduction of any reform depends on the growth and development of public opinion. If the Labour Party stands in need of anything at the present moment, it is a practical and radical land policy that will overthrow the privileges of the few. What lead does Mr. Smith propose to give in that direction? Is he for what is called confiscation or for land purchase, or for the taxation of land values? Or does he stand deliberately in the path of reform by actually advising organized workers against pledging themselves to any scheme? Divide and conquer was always the plan of the tyrants and oppressors of men. Diversity of opinion, differences in policy in face of the great economic enemy, the monopoly of land, will keep the people in darkness and deprived of their rights. And as long as Mr. Smith sees nothing to regret in that fact he may preach about the main consideration and the ultimate ideal until Doomsday.

One Way of "Reducing Rates."—The WESTMINSTER GAZETTE of 22nd March reports:—

Peterborough is in clover. As a result of revaluation there will be a reduction in the rates of 4s. 2d. in the £. Next year they will be 12s. 6d. in the £, against 16s. 8d. The city had not been re-valued for twenty-six years,