

## HOUSE FAMINE AND THE LAND BLOCKADE

MORE EXAMPLES OF COSTS, DIFFICULTIES AND DELAYS

*Walton and Weybridge, Surrey.*—It was proposed to purchase land forming part of Longmore Farm, Hersham. The owner objected to selling a part and the Council has been asked to purchase the whole. A valuation of the land is to be obtained. The owner of fields in Esher Road, Hersham, has declined to sell by agreement and the district valuer has not been able to come to terms in respect of land in Grotto Road, Weybridge. Compulsory Orders for purchase are to be made.—*Surrey Comet*, August 12, 1944.

*Peterborough, Northants.*—The Council received an offer of about 2½ acres of land at Garton End, desired for permanent allotments, the price the owner wanted being 1s. 6d. a square yard, equivalent to £365 an acre. The treasurer said it was doubtful if the Ministry would sanction the borrowing of the necessary sum to defray the cost. It was resolved that the land be not purchased.—*Peterborough Advertiser*, August 4, 1944.

*Keighley, Yorks.*—After negotiations for the acquisition of 86½ acres at Bracken Bank, the Council were resolving to make a compulsory purchase order and to apply to the Minister of Health for confirmation.—*Yorkshire Post*, March 31, 1944.

*Malton, Yorks.*—An inquiry at Malton, conducted by an inspector of the Ministry of Health, indicated the difficulties that faced the Rural District Council in securing sites for agricultural workers' cottages. The Clerk to the Council said that eight cottages had been allocated for the Malton rural area, two of which were at Bulmer and two at Thornton-le-Clay. They were not prepared to allow any owner to hold a pistol at their heads in matters like that. One owner was willing to sell the whole of a field, whereas only a part of it was needed, the price to be left to the County Valuer, and failing agreement the matter should be settled by arbitration.—*Northern Echo*, September 1, 1944.

*Gillingham, Kent.*—The land between Rainham Road and the Woodlands Estate was all agricultural 25 years ago. When the Corporation decided to develop the borough in an easterly direction, they purchased the Woodlands Estate, 23 acres, at approximately £130 per acre. The Corporation built the boulevard from Gillingham to Rainham (with ratepayers' money) and then, when they decided in 1935 to have a portion of this land at Langton for a playing field they paid £4,000 for 17 acres, the land having risen by this time to nearly £240 per acre. Further developments have since been made and thousands of pounds of ratepayers' money have been invested in opening up the area. And now, when the lads are hoping to come back and make homes in the land they

have fought for, the Council are purchasing another 7 acres of this land between Rainham Road, and this time the price paid is over £550 per acre.—*J. Hasberry in the Chatham Observer*, November 7, 1944.

*Beaconsfield, Bucks.*—Some years before the war negotiations began for the acquisition, by the Highways Committee, of the island block of property in Aylesbury End, at Beaconsfield, but the negotiations broke down. Renewed, they have resulted in an agreement to pay the owners £3,250. The site contains 426 square yards, and in due course it will be cleared for the widening of both the trunk road and the county road; at a cost of nearly £8 a square yard.—*Bucks Free Press*, December 1, 1944.

*Grimsby, Lincs.*—Protest against the Housing Committee's proposal to pay £18,000 for 35 acres of land [£514 per acre] was voiced at the Grimsby Finance Committee. The land is off Weelsby Road, near Weelsby Old Hall; the figure stated is that given by the District Valuer. Councillor Tickler asked how they could possibly build houses for a reasonable rent on land that was so expensive? The Mayor joined in the protest. Councillor Bloom pointed out that the Housing Committee had experienced great difficulty in securing land on which to build much needed houses; this site was thought to be most suitable; but Councillor Tickler added, "The ratepayers' pocket has no bottom."—*Grimsby Telegraph*, December 16.

*Cardiff.*—After a considerable discussion, Cardiff City Council decided to purchase three-quarters of an acre of land adjacent to a Cardiff tram depot for £2,635. Alderman Sir Herbert Hiles moved the reference back of the recommendation of the Transport Committee. It was the dearest piece of land he had ever heard the Corporation talk about, the price was a real ramp. Alderman Gough said it was an open invitation to every landowner in Cardiff. The motion to refer the matter back was lost.—*Western Mail*, August 1, 1944. Previous protests against this purchase were reported on July 14, when the City Treasurer explained that the land belonged to the Tredegar Estate, had previously been leased to a wagon-repairer, but last March the lease was not renewed because of the negotiations with the City Council.

*Kirkham, Lancs.*—Application for order for the compulsory acquisition of over four acres for post-war housing requirements was the subject of a public inquiry by a Ministry of Health inspector. The Clerk to the Kirkham Council said that despite repeated representations the owner had refused to sell. At the close of the enquiry the inspector visited the land and alternative sites.—*Lancashire Daily Post*, January 3.

*Kinmel Bay, Denbigh.*—At a meeting arranged by the Abergele Ratepayers' Association (*Western Mail*, January 15) Sir Henry Morris-Jones, M.P., said that they had very serious problems in Kinmel Bay. He had alleged in Parliament that land bought originally for £30 an acre had been sold for £100 a quarter of an acre, and up to £500 an acre, with additional charges for supposed road and sewerage works. A subsidiary company had been formed which was now selling water to the people there at a high cost. Sir Henry suggested Abergele Council should press for a public inquiry.

*Portsmouth.*—Plans for Southsea's redevelopment as a health and pleasure resort are likely to receive a severe setback. The city's plans visualise the exploitation of all natural assets of the Front and include the acquisition of the site of the Southsea Assembly Rooms, the Clarence Recreation Ground, Clarence Pier and Southsea Castle. The Council find themselves up against the snag of exaggerated land values—values which they themselves have helped to create. In 1922 the Council bought 171 acres of Southsea Common from the War Department for £45,000 [£263 per acre]. Fourteen years later they bought Lumps Fort and 14 adjoining acres from the War Department for £25,000 [about £1,600 per acre]. And now, for the site of the Assembly Rooms, the Commissioners of Crown Lands are asking £120,000. Councillor Glanville, revealing this figure, protested against Government departments making anything out of Portsmouth in this way; if land values had increased it was entirely due to the City Council's developments of Southsea; and he spoke also of the urgent need of land for houses, the War Department owning 1,818 acres on Portsdown Hill in addition to some 575 acres in the city.—*West Sussex Gazette*, January 18.

*Bingham, Nottinghamshire.*—It was disclosed by questions and answers in the House of Commons on March 23 last, that the Bingham Rural District Council were being charged £275 for half an acre on which to build four agricultural cottages. The land belonged to the Commissioners of Crown Lands. The price, the Minister of Agriculture said, was agreed between the Crown Surveyors and the District Valuer. "The site is near the centre of Bingham, with a frontage to the public street and with water and other services in the vicinity."

*Solving the Difficulty.*—Whether land is publicly or privately owned the rentor value of it is due to the same circumstances in either case; and the public authority can be as eager as the private owner to stand out for the best price. Land speculation is all one, as against the individual would-be user. Here one sees the Commissioners confirmed in their hold over the land, like any private owner of "withholder." The land remains unused and untaxed, although its value has been proved and the local authority has to search elsewhere for the

sites of these needed cottages. More-over wherever houses are built and occupied it is upon them that the rates fall.

The foregoing examples illustrate the folly and inequity of the present rating system, and how all this obstruction and delay would be overcome by the simple and just reform which would assess all land at its true value, levy rates and taxes upon that value, and relieve from taxation all buildings and other improvements.

### WHAT LAISSEZ-FAIRE REALLY MEANS

MR. T. ATHOLL ROBERTSON writes, in a letter to the *Palmer's Green Gazette*, January 5:

Your correspondent, Mr. Edgar C. Swanborough, appears to be quite satisfied with the prospect of National Socialism for employers and workers. I reckon employers and workers have more sense. Like some other people he mentions laissez-faire as a sort of reproach; it is a favourite party weapon, often used by people who do not understand its origin or meaning.

Let me give the origin of the word. In 1690 the Lyons Chamber of Commerce petitioned against the Minister Colbert in Paris, who had imposed many tariffs on trade, and when he asked them what more he could do, their spokesman replied "Laissez nous faire," i.e., "Let us alone"—remove taxes and restraints, unwind your red tape, dismiss your controllers.

As France got involved in war and the miseries of the people increased, a new school of economists and reformers appeared who gave scientific precision to the formula laissez-faire, and enlarged it into laissez-faire, laissez-aller, laissez-passer, i.e., "Give us freedom to work, to travel, and to sell, or buy, without having to pass through municipal tolls, or customs houses, paying duties on what we buy and sell."

The people of France failed to secure this freedom; the people of Great Britain did. The Radicals carried the Reform Bill of 1832, and the Repeal of the Corn Laws 1846, and we enjoyed a great measure of economic liberty from 1846 to 1914, and we prospered.

Peel and Gladstone emancipated our nation from many troublesome restrictions, and a multitude of tariffs and imports.

In France laissez-faire was an expression of revolt against unjust laws, and a cruel administration. We never had quite comparable conditions. I wish our people were familiar with the teachings of Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, who never used the term. Professor Marshall of Cambridge, in more recent times, has explained why the French used it.

Laissez-faire means personal liberty, untrammelled by the red tape of Whitehall, with independent courts of justice. It is no reproach; it is what we want restored to our post-war world. The opposite to it is just the National Socialism of Germany and a Fascist régime.

### BRITISH COLUMBIA

#### NEW WESTMINSTER LEVIES LOCAL TAXATION WHOLLY ON LAND VALUES

NEW WESTMINSTER is British Columbia's third-ranking city. The Mayor, Mr. W. M. Mott, contributed an article to the *American City*, November, 1944, in which he wrote:

A third of a century ago—on May 22, 1911—the following resolution was passed by the City Council of New Westminster:

"Whereas the ratepayers of the City of New Westminster have signified their desire to have improvements exempt from taxation:

"And whereas this Council deems it in the best interests of the City and a just system of taxation;

"Be it resolved that a By-law be prepared fixing the tax rate on Real Estate at 30 mills subject to a discount of 5 mills if paid on or before the 1st day of August, 1911, and that all improvements, save and except those improvements which may be on or in the streets and upon leased property upon which no land tax is being paid to the City, be exempt from taxation for the year 1911."

To-day the Royal City of New Westminster is still operating under the Single Tax System. Since 1911 to the present year, 1944:

Assessed value of land increased ..	70%
Assessed value of improvements increased .....	357%
Tax rate increased .....	134%
Population increased .....	80%

The above figures clearly show the steady growth of New Westminster.

To-day we have 84 manufacturing plants established in our city, with a capital investment of 20,000,000 dollars. They produce a gross annual value of products amounting to 39,000,000 dollars and provide gainful employment for 8,500 people.

Eighty-six per cent. of our householders own their own property, which we believe is the highest percentage in Canada. Land speculation has entirely disappeared since the adoption of Single Tax. To-day, the supply of non-productive or vacant property is rapidly diminishing; also a negligible amount is reverting to the city for non-payment of taxes.

#### IMPROVEMENTS ENCOURAGED

Our citizens have no hesitation about improving their property, knowing this will not increase their annual taxes. This is evident to anyone paying a visit to New Westminster. In every part can be found lovely homes surrounded by charming gardens where a profusion of flowers that can only be found in a contented city can be seen.

The manufacturers and business men are in an enviable position, since they can and do make improvements to their plants without the fear of increased taxation, a deterrent to all businesses desiring to expand. Further, from a competitive standpoint, our manufacturers are

favoured over those who must pay taxes on improvements.

The financial condition of New Westminster compares quite favourably with any city in North America for low per capita tax figures. We also have one of the highest percentages of tax collections.

We feel very confident that the abolition of taxes on the products of labour has been of material assistance in building up our city to the position she holds to-day—the third ranking city in British Columbia. *Buildings may come and buildings may go, but land is with us forever.*

Bill Greig in his "X-ray on the News," *Daily Mirror*, October 16, referred to an angry letter from a gentleman in Leicester who wrote pointing out that he had made a living for twenty years buying and selling land, and that he considers himself as much entitled to his profit as the man who deals in shoes or sugar. Bill Greig commented: "Well, I have known men who made both shoes and sugar and made a profit into the bargain. So if my correspondent will forward just the teeniest, weeniest bit of land he has made himself I shall give him the best in the argument."

The daily newspapers of November 28 last reported the statement by Alderman M. Greenwood (chairman of Liverpool Corporation's Estate Committee) that in 1777 the then Lord Sefton sold to the Corporation the reversion of a £30 ground rent, together with the royalty of the town, for £2,500. The land was heath and moss. Now that land was the centre of the city. It covered about two square miles.

In 1913 the land and the buildings on it were valued at £12,000,000, and they had since appreciated considerably.

Westminster has plans for dealing with over 4,000 houses in Westminster with leases only eight of which expire before 1951. The Grosvenor Estate own freeholds of 1,870 of the houses, the Cubitt Estates 645, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners 609, the Sloane Stanley Estate 316, and the Commissioners of Crown Lands 144.—*Estates Gazette*, May 6.

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