

"LOOK AROUND THE WORLD TODAY"

JORDAN : Speculation or Civil Engineering

A striking illustration of the recurrent and almost universal paradox of modern society comes from Amman, capital of Jordan. A British firm of planning consultants, Max Lock and Partners, have devised a revolutionary solution to the traffic problems of Amman, which lies in the hollow of a wadi. A ring road would be carried across the city on the roofs of flats and offices up to eight storeys high and specially insulated against vibration. The lay mind boggles at the thought of the technical difficulties involved but apparently these present no insuperable difficulty to modern civil engineers. Yet the problem of human relationships, for that is what it is, which stems from treating the rent of land as private property, remains to be solved. The local government correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, February 28, who described the British firm's plan, expressed the problem in this way:—

"The whole of Amman has been declared a town-planning area, with the effect that all private development is subject to control pending the formal approval of the plan. The main deficiency still to be remedied is a means of preventing speculation in land values. In its absence the provisions of the plan cannot yet be disclosed in detail.

"Ten years ago, before Palestine was partitioned, Amman was little more than a big village, with a population of some 40,000 chiefly employed in trading and administration. Since then its population has increased fivefold, largely because of the influx of refugees from Israel. One consequence is that a bare mountain top, worth £500 in 1946, can now be sold at £8,000 an acre—if development moves in that direction."

Messrs. Lock and Partners were commissioned by the United Nations as part of its programme of technical assistance to Jordan, to advise its Government on all aspects of town planning.

An Arab Writes from Amman

From Amman, Jordan, an Arab correspondent has written to a member of the International Union, gratefully acknowledging receipt of *Toward Real Peace* by Justice F. A. W. Lucas in these terms:

"This problem, the land question, in this part of the world has been and is still creating great troubles to many people. I sincerely wish that these ideas may be carried out in your country so that we may hope that they will reach the Near East in the near future. No doubt that peace problems will be solved through this justice, although many people will surely oppose and struggle hard against Land-Value Taxation.

"To give you an idea of the great changes in the value of lands in Amman, a piece of land bought in 1950 for £150 was sold in 1953 for £600, and in 1955 for £2,400, without effecting any improvement to the land. This is caused by reason of the increase of immigrants from Palestine—which is really unusual in this case. But still the amount of taxation collected on this land did not compare at all with its value."

"LANDLORDISM ENDS IN BIHAR"

Under this heading, *Peace News*, January 13, printed the following report. "Landlordism has been ended in all 17 districts of the Province of Bihar, in north-eastern India. On New Year's Day the state Government abolished private ownership of 200,000 private estates in nine districts. It had

taken similar action some months ago in eight other districts.

"Compensation will be made to the landlords (zamindars) at a cost of 158 crores of Rupees (£118.5 million) payable in forty instalments in cash and bonds. The rents which formerly went to the landlords, 16 crores of rupees annually, will now go to the Bihar government. Plans for redistribution of the lands to the peasants have not yet been acted upon. The Land Gift Movement of Vinoba Bhave had concentrated much work in the province. Bihar, though not a large state, ranked second in the number of acres contributed."

The information given here is too slender to permit a full appraisal of the Bihar Government's action, but these points may be made. Apparently there is to be no reduction in the rack-rents paid by the peasants who have merely changed masters. The burden of taxation is not reduced. Those who have monopolised natural opportunities and who have been enriched by the efforts of others are to continue to live on the backs of producers for the next forty years, although it may be that they will receive annually less than hitherto, or less than they might otherwise have been able to command in the future. The privileged class of wealthy bond-holders which has been created is a threat to the political well being of the State and it will be surprising if, having accepted compensation, they do not seek to resume their ownership of the soil. The power of the Government over the lives of the people has been immeasurably strengthened.

The only tangible benefit likely to accrue is that valuable land formerly held out of use may now be made available, with resultant increase of opportunity and production. The same result would have been achieved more readily if the taxation of land values had been adopted. In addition that policy would have reduced the Government's control over the economic life of the community and have enabled taxation to be considerably reduced. It would have caused rents to fall, to the benefit of cultivators and land users of every kind, and would have obliged former rent-recipients to engage in production. It would have broken up large estates and at the same time would have led to the aggregation of uneconomic fragmentary holdings, two of the banes of India.

UTTAR PRADESH AND AFGHANISTAN

International Aid to Asiatic Landlords

A reader in Norway, Mr. Halfdan Hansen, has drawn our attention to a remarkably illuminating sentence appearing in a United Nations document, while from St. Leonards-on-Sea, Mr. Perrott sends an article from a special correspondent published by *The Times*, January 25. He underlines a similar sentence.

The United Nations document reviews the achievements of five malaria control demonstration projects undertaken in South-East Asia during 1949-50 by the World Health Organisation (W.H.O.) and the United Nations Children's Fund (U.N.I.C.E.F.). It was published in October, 1952, under reference E/ICEF/204 by the U.N. Economic and Social Council. Paragraph 26 summarises the improvement in economic conditions arising as a result of the virtual elimination of malaria and is in the following terms:

"Official figures released by the Superintendent of Terai and Bhabar Estates show that in the period 1948-51, the population of the entire Terai area of U.P. has increased from 167,000 to 284,248, due largely to the rehabilitation of displaced persons from the Punjab, while the area under