

# TAX OR BUY?

## A Mixed Bag for Scarborough

THE land values problem is due to be aired at the Labour Party conference at Scarborough early this month. What will be the outcome is anybody's guess for constituency parties canvass greatly differing policies. Thus Gloucester affirms that public ownership is the only remedy for the present chaotic position, and Newcastle-up-Tyne agrees. S.W. Herts wants the national executive to consider land nationalisation immediately, and Lichfield wants it to devise a policy on those lines "so that the enhanced values of land" may be publicly enjoyed.

Oldham East would nationalise urban land in congested industrial areas and overcrowded towns; Holborn & St. Pancras (South) would include all urban land, as well as hitherto undeveloped land on which it is intended to build, and would institute an emergency price control scheme.

Kingston-upon-Hull (East) wants the Government to take steps forthwith to stop the fast rising cost of land to local authorities. It does not say how.

More perceptive than most, Feltham (Middlesex) urges the national executive to formulate "a definite policy in relation to the taxation of land values as the fairest and quickest method of dealing with the land problem". It also favours a capital gains tax on all increases of land values.

Carlton considers that "a levy on annual increases in the site value of land" would provide the first step in meeting the problem of "uncontrolled land speculation resulting in excessive cost of building land." Fulham wants the executive to formulate proposals "to provide local authorities with new sources of revenue, and to secure for the public the increased wealth now accruing from the rising cost of land."

Leasehold reform, a perennial favourite, is wanted by Gower, while Bournemouth socialists, with their demand for a central Land Board, appear to have learned little from the breakdown of the 1947 Act.

London Labour Party urges that "the local government financial structure should be reviewed in order to secure a greater degree of independence and local authorities should be empowered to levy a rate on the site value of land so as to provide a supplementary source of local revenue." This follows the recommendation in the London Labour Party report quoted in our May & June issue.

Widnes believes there is need for a variety of sources of local revenue and lists three examples: a local income tax, the rating of site values, and the rating of empty property. But Eccles, another Lancashire town,

would very properly delete reference to a local income tax. Socialists at Romford (Essex) and Oxford, however, masochistically yearn to pay income tax to the town hall as well as in support of national government. Epsom accepts Oxford's adjective—iniquitous — and wants the national executive to examine the present rating system but it does not want a municipal income tax.

There are 162 resolutions on disarmament and 64 concerned with socialist principles, future policy and party unity. Other principal topics for discussion are: agriculture, education, the National Health Service and pensions, housing and roads and political and commercial advertising. The conference meets daily in the Spa Grand Hall, Scarborough, from October 3 to 7.

### BLINKERED UNIONISTS

IN line with Labour Party policy, the general council of the Trades Union Congress has urged the Minister of Housing to take immediate steps to build more new towns and to encourage the development of towns with more financial aid. It wants the Government to encourage and help local authorities to buy urban land for redevelopment, and to encourage them to engage in profit-making enterprises.

These reactionary proposals, if adopted, would throw new burdens on taxpayers and ratepayers, including 8 million trades unionists; they are designed to mitigate conditions arising from failure to rate and tax land values. On that the general council is silent. Instead it has urged the Minister to restore the 1947 practice of charging betterment and to ensure that land changes hands at existing use value. Fortunately there is not the remotest likelihood that Mr. Brooke would turn the clock back to 1947. The T.U.C. has also demanded a Royal Commission to inquire into the adequacy of the present machinery for town and country planning.

### LIBERAL SUPPORT

RECENT Liberal Party moves to secure land-value rating legislation have included resolutions adopted by the Bebington (Cheshire) and Colchester (Essex) associations, a letter addressed to the Prime Minister by the executive of the West Ham association, and a motion moved by Councillor David Evans at a meeting of Southend-on-Sea County Borough Council. Mr. Evans argued that the Government should impose a tax on land values to stop the upward spiralling of land prices. Fourteen councillors agreed but the Tories moved the closure to prevent a full debate.