

## Rating Bill Passed By Commons

MR. WADE'S BID FOR PILOT LAND VALUATION FAILS

THE Rating and Valuation Bill was given an unopposed Third Reading by the Commons on May 10 and goes now to the Lords. It was long in Committee, where twelve Amendments were made, and further Amendments were made on Report. The Parliamentary Secretary claimed that it makes "a number of useful improvements," which is true enough, and the Minister said it was designed to protect the householder. More accurately, its object is to prevent the householders' present lamentable position from materially worsening in 1963. It removes some anomalies, anachronisms and absurdities and extends the present system. What a way to run a railway — with the signals at red and the points switched to stagnation — and what a comment on Ministerial pipe dreams of increasing production and exports, stabilising living costs, clearing slums, improving sound, old property, extending home ownership, redeveloping twilight areas, and so forth. The Bill endorses a land speculators' charter.

Mr. Brooke told only half the story when he said that time allowed him no alternative but to bring in the Bill if some householders were not to suffer too badly. No economic, technical nor procedural obstacle prevented him from bringing in a Bill to rate land values only — only misguided political hostility. He stands pat on the hostile findings of past investigations, invalid when made and now quite irrelevant.

The Minister frankly admits that the present system has undesirable features. In his concluding speech he said that of course criticism was rife among great numbers of people but "so is criticism of the tax system, so is criticism of the railway system, and so is the criticism of other political parties. There is no getting away from that." Many will consider that a pretty lame defence especially in view of Mr. Brooke's next remarks. "If anyone could think of a better rating system, I am quite sure Governments would be ready to adopt it. An enormous amount of examination has been made into possible alternatives, and no alternative has been discovered."

One gasps at such a statement. When and where has there been a trial land valuation and survey to compare the incidence of a rate on land values with that of a rate on buildings? Without such an investigation how can the method we propose be brushed aside? Not only has none been made but, if Mr. Brooke has his way, none will be made in future. The least he could have done was to have provided for one to be made in 1963.

The Liberals urged that course. A constructive, modest Amendment as follows was put down on Report by Mr.

Donald Wade, M.P., supported by three other Liberals, but it was not taken:—

### *Pilot Survey for Site Rating.*

(i) In the year following that in which valuation lists come into force for the first time after the passing of this Act the Minister shall, in consultation with such associations of local authorities as appear to be concerned and with any local authority with whom consultation appears to him to be desirable, cause to be carried out a pilot survey and valuation of any appropriate area or areas based on the site value of land in such area or areas, whether occupied or not, with a valuation on the current basis.

(ii) The Minister shall cause to be laid before Parliament a report of such survey and valuation made under this section.

The Whips permitting, opponents no less than supporters could have supported a clause so worded. It sought only to establish the truth on a matter of burning public interest, and the cost would have been infinitesimal. Yet some Conservative M.Ps. informed certain of our readers that because of their opposition to the rating of land values they would not have been able to support the clause and others wrote that they would be guided by the Minister. A few gave guarded replies which were a little more encouraging.

With the door slammed shut against reform by the antediluvians still fighting the totally different battle with Lloyd George of half a century ago, we are left with this situation, as described by the Minister:—

*"The rating system that we are improving in this Bill raises annually something over £600 million in England and Wales. It does it not without difficulties, not without some litigation and not without a good deal of vexation, but it does it, and does it with reasonable fairness, and I submit that it will do it with greater fairness and fewer anomalies as a result of this legislation."*

### SHIPYARDS IN JEOPARDY

VEXATION is too mild a word to describe how some Conservative back-benchers and one important section of British industry feel about an aspect of Mr. Brooke's "improved, reasonably fair" rating system. On Recommendation, Mr. Paul Williams, Conservative M.P. for Sunderland, South, moved a clause which was negatived to leave shipyards rated on only one-half of their assessed values. He read a letter from a ship builder who has spent a considerable sum in developing his yard. Rates at present are about £14,000 a year which amounts to about £3,500 for each ship built "which in itself is quite suffi-