

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

## RECENT LAND REFORMS IN SPAIN

BY A DECREE of 7th October, 1936, the Spanish Government enacted that all rural estates, of whatever size, which belonged to persons or their spouses or to companies which had participated directly or indirectly in the insurrection against the Republic, should be expropriated by the State without compensation.

The use of these lands is given to the labourers and inhabitants of the district or of adjoining districts in perpetuity. It is a matter for the majority to decide whether the land is to be cultivated collectively or individually. The amount of land which may be held by any individual is not to exceed 30 hectares (one hectare is slightly less than 2½ acres) of ordinary agricultural land, 8 hectares of orchard, or 4 hectares of irrigated land.

Continued possession of the land is conditional upon reasonable use being made of it, and that the holders pay a rent to the State for it. In order to help the holders at the beginning the Government has given them a moratorium from payment of rent till September, 1938, and will if necessary afford them credits for buying supplies.

At the same time the Government has abolished the restrictions upon dealings in wheat and wheat flour and restored a free market in these commodities.

Mr C. Villalobos Domínguez, from whose article in *España Republicana* (4th September) we take this information, says that as almost all the landowners, whether large or small, declared themselves enemies of the Republic, nearly all the land in the country districts has passed into the hands of the Government.

One result of the reform has been that the harvest in the regions subject to the Republican Government has been more abundant than ever before. This is the result of individual effort under conditions of security of tenure.

No information is available as to how the rents will be assessed or whether steps will be taken to distinguish between the cultivators' improvements and the value of the land itself.

## Baldomero Argente

In July last the Secretary of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade made representation to the Spanish Government through the Spanish Embassy in Paris in favour of Senor Baldomero Argente, a Vice-President of the Union, and resident in Madrid. The request was that this eminent social philosopher be permitted to leave Madrid and dwell under conditions of greater safety whereby he could devote himself in needful tranquillity to the writing of what is likely to be one of the greatest contributions to economic literature. Letter has been received, dated 5th October, from the Spanish Embassy conveying the reply of the Spanish Government to the effect that the Government is not warranted in granting the petition considering that the Ex-Minister, Senor Argente, is under sufficient guarantee within its territory.

## ERRATA

IN THE October issue, page 149, first column, line 35, for Sir Edward Baker read *Professor Ernest A. Baker*; page 153, second column, line 16, for improved read *unimproved*. In the September issue, page 136, first column, line 39, for so . . . read *sc . . .* Judge Archer in his observations in Court about high rents was obviously about to say "It is perfectly scandalous."

## NEW ZEALAND

## A Judicial Pronouncement on Wages

IN A DECISION on rates of wages on 8th September (*New Zealand Herald* report) by the Wages Arbitration Court, over which Mr Justice O'Regan presided, these statements appear:—

"The Court disclaims the extravagant functions ascribed to it by certain speakers during the hearing, such as that 'the Court is called upon to measure out to the producers the portion of the national income which is considered to be their due.'

"The obvious reply is, first, that all recipients of the national income are not within the jurisdiction of the Court, and, secondly, that the rates of wages in all occupations are not determined by the Court, but by the price of land, a fact which was well understood by Edward Gibbon Wakefield when he proposed, as an essential feature of his scheme of colonization, that a fictitious price should be placed on land 'to ensure a plentiful labour supply by preventing labourers from becoming landowners too soon.' It is not generally realized that the Wakefield plan, instead of being of historic interest merely is actually in full operation in this country to-day.

"Here we have a country more than six times the area of Denmark, having a population of only 15 people to the square mile, in which there is an artificial dearth of land for settlement and in which the fundamental industry of agriculture is, relatively speaking, languishing. In spite of its wealth of statistical information and the use made of same at the hearing, it is a matter for comment that the Year Book does not disclose the number of farmers in this country. We have Professor Tocker's evidence, however, that 'the proportion of the people who are farming has decreased considerably in the last 30 years.' This state of affairs may be contrasted with that obtaining in Denmark, where half the population is engaged in agriculture.

## THE NEED FOR FARMERS

"Under the circumstances it is not surprising that Professor Tocker agrees that we need more farmers. The urban population has its part to play in the national development, but it is clear that the centres are growing increasingly 'top-heavy,' as it were, in that they are not buttressed by an adequate rural population. The result is that there is undue competition for employment in the secondary industries, and hence the tendency of wages to decline. Like all natural laws the law of supply and demand is altogether beneficent, but operating under unnatural conditions it is blamed for evils which can be corrected only by removing the cause. That is a matter exclusively within the jurisdiction of Parliament. Labour advocates accordingly would do well to realize that this Court cannot claim functions peculiarly within the province of Parliament. Confronted with an unhealthy social situation, the Court can at best endeavour to palliate the effects of evils which it is powerless to remove."

The judgment affected various classes of workers and wages fixed were: skilled 2s. 9d. an hour; semi-skilled 2s. 5d. to 2s. 7½d. an hour; unskilled 2s. 4d. an hour.

The other arbiters were Mr W. Cecil Prime, employers' member, and Mr A. L. Monteith, employees' member. It was explained that the pronouncement was the decision of a majority, Mr Prime dissenting.