

WHY DID MUSSOLINI GO TO WAR ?

An answer to this question is provided by Mr Louis Fischer in an article in *The New Statesman and Nation* (4th January). He refers to the growth of Italy's population from sixteen to forty millions in little over a century, and the disproof of Malthusian forebodings by the experience of all countries. He interviewed Signor Rossoni, Minister of Agriculture, and member of the Fascist Grand Council of Eighteen, who agreed that intensive cultivation by small farmers produces more crops and employs more men than big estates.

"You have a dictatorship. Why don't you nationalize the land?"

"A dictatorship," the Minister replied, "is a political matter, not an economic or social matter. We cannot take away the land from the landlords. We cannot even fix the price at which we compensate the owners. Land prices are fixed in Italy just as they are in France, America and other countries. We shall proceed in the same way as we have in the past and take over, with compensation, only those lands which are not cultivated."

There is something in this for advocates of land nationalization to ponder. The Minister added, if the landlords wished to sell all or part of their estates, "that is all right." He anticipated that they could in this way place 2,000,000 hectares under cultivation and settle 400,000 families in the next five years. The State equips and stocks the holdings, and is repaid over a term of 20 years.

Mr Fischer's comment is: "This method must be slow and inadequate, for it imposes a heavy financial burden on the State. Many landowners have grown extremely rich by selling all or parts of their huge 'latifundia' at fancy prices. Moreover, many peasants hesitate to assume such gigantic debts at the beginning of a new and difficult career. It is probably for this reason that 'crowded' Italy has much untilled land."

A Rome congress of Fascist peasant syndicates in the provinces, reported in the *Osservatore Romano* of 7th December, had urged that this untilled land should be divided. So Mr Fischer pressed his point and asked: "You have a dictatorship. You can send people to war, maybe to their death. Why cannot you take vacant land away from the estate owners and give it to the peasants?"

Signor Rossoni's reply was: "That is demagoguery. Peasants must be directed. 'Give land to the peasants.' That is a phrase. There must be organization. We are Fascists, not Socialists."

Further light on the real obstacle is given in an interview with Signor Ferruccio, the Under-Minister of Corporations, who said: "The corporation tried to find a common ground between the proprietor of the factory and the workman. The proprietor, however, remains the proprietor, and the workers remain the workers. . . . The regime of corporations is not anti-capitalist."

To which evidently we should add: The landlord remains the landlord. The regime is not anti-landlord.

Although shorn of its legislative functions the Senate still exists. It is "a symbol of conservatism and especially of intimate ties with the land. The Senate includes many heads of landed aristocratic families. As long as royalty, nobility, and a powerful estate-owning class exist, all the free and under-cultivated soil of Italy naturally cannot be distributed among land-hungry peasants."

Yet, strange to say, the leaders of the Fascists do not stress the economic side of the Abyssinian war. They

say that although the wealth of Abyssinia is an element in the problem the decisive reasons are moral and political. Italy has a mission. We have a right to an empire. War dignifies.

Perhaps, too, they remember how few are the Italian inhabitants of Libya and Abyssinia. In Eritrea there are only 4,560 Italians, most of them officials or missionaries. In the whole Italian colonial empire there are only 3,000 Italian peasants.

How is Mussolini to cut the Gordian knot? Mr Fischer says: "Several weeks ago, one hears, he told a number of foreigners that the Abyssinian war may lead him to make a social revolution. How he could do that he did not say. But this is a pregnant thought. Apparently, Mussolini realizes wherein he has failed."

AGRICULTURAL POLICY

A Farmer's Views

"An interesting paper on 'The Best Basis for Great Britain's Agricultural Policy' delivered by Mr A. G. Street (the well-known authority and author of 'Land Everlasting' and other works), at the Farmers' Club on 9th December is reprinted in the December issue of *The Land Union Journal*. We quote some extracts:—

"I would here draw your attention to the great difference in farming between production and sales. For instance, I produce about 150 tons of hay per annum, but I don't sell any hay as hay, I sell my hay in terms of meat and milk. Let us, then, look at the sales, or rather at the branches of farming from which our farmers obtain their money income. In 1931 British farmers obtained 72 per cent from livestock, 2.18 per cent from wheat, 6.13 per cent from total grain, 3.25 per cent from sugar beet, and the remainder largely from market garden produce, hops, and a little from hay and straw. Any alterations in these proportions since 1931 still leave livestock the larger branch.

"Let us now consider a livestock policy and a grain policy side by side. Our livestock products are or could be superior in quality to overseas products. Our grain products are, except for oats, inferior. When it pays a farmer to keep livestock his land is kept in good heart; when grain growing becomes attractive, too often the land is robbed. Our climate is more suited to livestock of all kinds than to grain. The livestock branches of farming usually pay the highest wages. Livestock farming makes it possible for the little man to start, and also gives him a better chance of competing with the large farmer. Grain growing does neither. The stability of farming in every part of Britain varies in direct proportion to the amount of livestock farming carried on.

"But here is perhaps the greatest point to consider. The majority of our farmers, both large and small, are buyers of grain or its equivalent as a feeding stuff for their stock. For that purpose it is a raw material which they use in the production of their main selling lines. Hens eat wheat, all livestock eat oats, and the greater bulk of our barley is used as a feed for stock.

WHEAT

"Let me give honour where honour is undoubtedly due and say that the wheat quota has achieved that Alice-in-Wonderland thing. It has done great good to a few farmers and very little harm to any.

Against that I would point out that every one of you knows where in your own neighbourhood it has led to some bad farming.

OATS

"Farmers have, so I am told, greatly benefited by the tariff on oats. I just cannot see it. As horse-feed one can very fairly describe oats as power.