

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT WOULD BAR LAND SPECULATION

Among the many large public works now being undertaken by the United States Government is a project for constructing the Grand Coulee Dam in the Columbia Basin in the State of Washington. This is estimated to cost in all \$126,000,000 and will when completed not only be a source of water-power but will enable an area of 1,200,000 acres of arid but highly fertile land to be irrigated.

A correspondent has sent us a copy of the proceedings before the Senate Committee on Irrigation and Reclamation on 21st April which considered a Bill (2.S172) entitled to be for the purpose of preventing speculation and of enabling settlers to obtain land at fair prices.

The Bill was introduced at the instance of the President who wrote:—

"A tremendous benefit will accrue to the Northwest by the building of Grand Coulee Dam and power plant, and the Columbia Basin irrigation project. I am in favour of the Federal Government providing adequate funds so that the construction at Grand Coulee may proceed in an efficient manner and without delay.

"Nevertheless, it is only fair that I should tell you that before the appropriation of funds for the construction of Grand Coulee Dam as a high structure, it is my thought that the Congress assure itself of complete control over the lands in the Columbia Basin which would be irrigated.

"I know that you will agree with me that it is unthinkable that real-estate profits should accrue to private individuals solely because of this great government work.

"Therefore, in my judgment, construction of the high dam should be dependent on the elimination of private profits, speculative or otherwise, which would result from this proposed action by the Federal Government."

It was stated in evidence before the Committee that most of the land was almost valueless without water. It has been selling at from 50 cents to \$15 an acre. The latter figure indicates that there has already been some speculation, as the project has been under discussion for some years and work has been commenced on it. The land is at present assessed for taxation at an average of \$2.30 an acre. It is estimated that when irrigated it will be worth \$85 an acre. A considerable portion of the land affected is held in large holdings ranging from 5,000 to 40,000 acres, a considerable portion is also held by the State and county authorities.

The Bill provides that no person shall hold more than 40 irrigable acres. As a condition of receiving water for his land, each landholder is to be compelled to enter into a contract by which he undertakes to sell all his land in excess of this minimum holding in terms and conditions approved by the Secretary of the Interior. The value of the land is to be appraised in its existing condition without regard to the benefit expected from irrigation. If any land is sold the owner is required to pay to the Government a percentage of the excess of the selling price over the appraised value plus the value of any improvements made after the date of the original appraisal. If payment is made within one month of sale the amount to be paid by the owner is 50 per cent of the excess. If payment is delayed the amount to be paid is increased by one per cent each month, so that if payment is delayed for 50 months the whole excess is to be paid to the government.

It will be seen that the Bill hardly bears out its title. It does not prevent speculation but it enables the

government to obtain a proportion of the increase in the value of the land. It will also, though this is not so clear, prevent the sale of land in blocks of more than 40 acres.

Although this measure may be welcomed as an attempt to deal with the problem, it certainly does not fully achieve the purpose mentioned in the President's letter. Neither does it contain a permanent solution of the problem for it makes no provision to ensure that the land value shall for all time enure to the people.

MR WINSTON CHURCHILL AS LANDOWNER

Carnlough, a fishing village on the picturesque Antrim coast road, with a population of 800, is greatly excited, for Mr Winston Churchill, its landlord, is anxious to sell his interest to his tenants. But they, at a meeting held, have declined to accept his terms, unanimously describing his offer as too high. Mr McCann, solicitor, who presided told a representative of the *Daily Mail* (19th June) that the sale might involve £20,000 on Mr Churchill's terms and this was too stiff. "It really means," said Mr McCann, "that Mr Churchill wants in cash the ground rent multiplied by so many years purchase. The period varied from 40 to 60 years. I doubt if Mr Churchill has ever met his tenants but some of them are very poor although Carnlough is one of the prettiest towns on the Antrim coast." The *Daily Mail* correspondent was informed that Mr Churchill's property also includes beautiful Garron Tower estate and glens in the vicinity.

There was the famous speech in Edinburgh (17th July, 1909) which Mr Churchill made and with which his Carnlough tenants might well be acquainted. That was when he was portraying the land monopolist in vivid colours and was making the pace for the Land Value Taxation policy which would bring immense and undisputed advantage to society—since when we have lost that protagonist. But these phrases from the great speech will come home to the folks in Carnlough: "The land monopolist contributes nothing to the general welfare; he contributes nothing even to the process from which his own enrichment is derived. If the land were occupied by shops or by dwellings, the municipality at least would secure the rates upon them in aid of the general fund, but the land may be unoccupied, undeveloped, it may be what is called 'ripening,' ripening at the expense of the whole city, of the whole country, for the increment of the owner. Roads perhaps have to be diverted to avoid this forbidden area. The merchant going to his office, the artisan going to his work, have to make a detour or pay a tram fare to avoid it . . . And all the while the land monopolist has only to sit still and watch complacently his property multiplying in value sometimes manifold without effort or contribution on his part; and that is justice . . . At last the land becomes ripe for sale—that means that the price is too tempting to be resisted any longer. And then, and not till then, it is sold by the yard or by the inch at 10 times, or 20 times, or even 50 times its agricultural value.

"All comes back to the land value, and its owner for the time being is able to levy his toll upon all other forms of wealth and upon every form of industry . . . and the landowner who in many cases is a worthy person utterly unconscious of the character of the methods by which he is enriched, is enabled with resistless strength to absorb to himself a share of almost every public and private benefit, however important or however pitiful those benefits may be."

After pointing out that in speaking of the land monopolist, he was dealing more with the process than with the individual landowner, that he was not holding any class up to public disapprobation, that it was not the individual he was attacking but the system and it was not the man who was bad but it was the law which is bad, Mr Churchill said: "We see the evil, we see the imposture upon the public, and we see the consequences in crowded slums, in hampered commerce, in distorted or restricted development, and in congested centres of population, and we say here and now to the land

monopolist who is holding up his land: 'This property of yours might be put to immediate use with general advantage. It is at this minute saleable in the market at 10 times the value at which it is rated. If you choose to keep it idle in the expectation of still further unearned increment, then at least you shall be taxed at the true selling value in the meanwhile'."

He had gone to Scotland to exhort the people to engage in this battle for freeing the land. Will Mr Churchill now go to Carnlough in Antrim and deliver himself there of the same sentiments?

TOLSTOY'S ESSAYS AND RECOLLECTIONS

With the appearance of Volume 21 the Centenary Edition of the works of Leo Tolstoy reaches its conclusion. Thanks to the labours of Mr Aylmer Maude as general editor and translator there is now available in uniform shape a much more complete and accurate version of Tolstoy's writings than has before been available to the English reader. The Oxford University Press is also to be congratulated on making this undertaking possible. The volumes are only to be obtained as a set (price £9 9s.) and are so unfortunately beyond the purse of most readers, but they should certainly be in all public libraries.

The present volume is of particular interest to us for it contains *A Great Iniquity* and the two *Letters on Henry George* in which Tolstoy expresses his considered opinion upon the land question and his unqualified approval of George's solution. As Mr Maude says in his introductory note this was "a matter on which Tolstoy felt very strongly. He sympathized with the peasants' grievance at having to go short of land while men who did not work on it owned large estates which some of them had never even seen. Henry George's plan for the taxation of land values seemed to him to be by far the most just and practicable way of dealing with the matter; and looking back now, we can see how much the adoption of that plan would have done to mitigate the worst evils of the Revolution that was then approaching." He adds: "This was, I think, one of many instances in which Tolstoy saw further and more clearly into a complex problem than the 'practical' men who refused to listen to his advice."

It is also appropriate that this volume should have an introduction by Mr Hamlin Garland who refers to his first interest in Tolstoy's writings as a student in Boston in 1884. "My interest in Tolstoy was deepened by the report of his expressed agreement with Henry George's land theories, of which I was an earnest advocate, and in the great Russian's sketches and essays I soon found many points of agreement with him."

One is tempted to make many quotations. The essay on *Non-acting*, for instance, deserves thoughtful reading in this day when the cult of ceaseless activity has become almost a religion, culminating in the worship of force. How apposite are these sentences: "No one doubts that if men continue to snatch from one another the ownership of the soil and the products of their labour, the revenge of those who are deprived of the right to till the soil will not much longer be delayed, but the oppressed will retake with violence and vengeance all that of which they have been robbed. No one doubts that the arming of the nations will lead to terrible massacres and the ruin and degeneration of all the peoples enchained in the circle of armaments. No one doubts that if the present order of things continues for some

dozens of years longer it will lead to a general breakdown. We have but to open our eyes to see the abyss towards which we are advancing."

A few sentences later is a passage which will recall a well-known passage in *Social Problems*: "All the great revolutions in men's lives are made in thought. When a change takes place in man's thought, action follows the direction of thought as inevitably as a ship follows the direction given by its rudder."

It should be added that the translations are clearer and in many cases reveal a deeper meaning than some of those previously current. A number of useful notes on matters of fact have been added, and the edition is free from those disconcerting comments which were added by former editors who thought that they could explain Tolstoy better than he explained himself.

BRITAIN'S BROKEN WORD

The Rev A. G. Fraser, Principal of Newbattle Abbey College, speaking at a conference of the Scottish Division of the Young Women's Christian Association at Balrossie, Kilmalcolm (*Glasgow Herald*, 16th April) said:

"We could not have peace so long as we had injustice, and in this modern world we could not confine our justice to one continent only. We talked about the sanctity of treaties and we said that Hitler breaks his word. There was not an African who believed the word of a British Governor, because we had broken our treaties with the Africans by the score, whether it was in Kenya, Rhodesia, South Africa, or West Africa."

"Once upon a time we thought it was right for a man to own another man. Now the conscience of the people held that slavery was not justified. No more was the possession of another nation justified."

"The only empire which could last was that which was based on service, not an empire that was based on exploitation. The reason why every empire had died had been that it had been based on exploitation."

"To-day through companies we had more exploitation than ever we had through individuals, because companies had no conscience. If we were going to have peace in Europe, we had to have a sense of international righteousness, and we could not get that except by showing it where we ourselves had the power."

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This was strong meat for the organizers of the Conference. Without denying the truth, they wished to be disassociated from its expression. Next day the *Glasgow Herald* published a letter from Marjorie Wilson, President of the Y.W.C.A., Scottish Division, she writing: "The address given by Principal Fraser, of Newbattle Abbey College, on 'The World in which we live' in no way reflects the opinion of the Y.W.C.A. of Great Britain, Scottish Division, from whose platform he was speaking."