

## PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES.

### HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING BILL

*Monday, April 7th*

The PRESIDENT OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOARD (Dr. Addison): I beg to move: "That the Bill be now read a second time."

We are dealing just now with an actual shortage of houses, and with what I may further describe as a concealed shortage. The number of houses erected for the working classes annually was 80,000, and we have now a war arrear of, say, 350,000 houses of this class which would have been built had it not been for the war. But we have a much more serious shortage even than that. There is no one familiar with the life of many of our cities and villages who is not well acquainted with the large number of houses which are not fit for habitation for families. Our information on this subject, considering the amount of public attention the matter has received, is singularly incomplete. A Return, which is the best I could find, was provided by local authorities in 1914, and although it only covers about a quarter of the houses of the working-class type it showed that there were 70,000 quite unfit for habitation, and a further 300,000 which were seriously defective. That is to say, in a survey which did not pretend to include all the existing houses in 1914, there were found to be no fewer than 370,000 either entirely unfit or seriously defective. That condition has to be dealt with along with any actual shortage due to arrears of building during the war. There is, therefore, it is clear, a double aspect of this housing question, because people will continue to live in a large number of these dwellings until something better is provided in the locality. Apart from that, there is everywhere, in the outskirts of every town and in many of our villages, an urgent demand for new houses. I see that there are about 3,000,000 people who live in what is described as an over-crowded condition—that is to say, more than two in a room—and in the area covered by the London County Council their Return tells us that there were 750,000 living in this condition. There is a problem big enough to deal with, entirely apart from the great undertaking of the provision of new houses on open ground.

What are the powers and duties of local authorities at the present time? There are 1,800 of these authorities, or more, and they can issue an order closing a house which is unfit for habitation. Under existing circumstances any authority is very averse from doing that. It is an extraordinary thing that, although they are authorised to issue closing orders there is no penalty on the landlord for re-letting the house after the closing order has been applied.

Lieutenant-Colonel THORNE: And you cannot make them pull down, either.

Dr. ADDISON: In Section 21 of this Bill we deal with that. The next thing is with regard to the vast mass of houses that are not so bad that they ought to be demolished, but are still very unsatisfactory. What can the local authority do? Under the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1909, they can require the owner to put his property in a condition, "in all respects reasonably fit for human habitation." The standards, of course, improve, and what might have been regarded as "fit for human habitation" fifty years ago is not so regarded to-day, but, as a matter of fact, the power of the authority in respect of making anybody keep his property of this kind in a proper condition or to do it themselves is very limited. At all events, the result is what we see to-day. In 1914 there was a return of nearly 400,000 houses thoroughly unsatisfactory, so that it is quite clear that the present powers are wholly inadequate to deal with it. Again, there is no power to require the owner to adjust or fit the house to bring it up to a reasonable standard. It is perfectly evident that it is by no means the fault of the owners of this property that it is in this condition, especially in the case of the freehold. These places have been let on leases and are then sub-let and sub-let again, and so on, and the freeholder may be in the position of seeing his property gradually degenerate into a slum and have no power whatever to step in and do anything to alter it.

These are reasons why so little has been achieved up to the present. There is another reason—the cost of acquisition. Where the authority has condemned an area and requires to pull the place down the cost is so enormous under the present statutes that it is almost prohibitive. It is evident that no solution of the question can be achieved unless we can make the cost of closing in some way reasonably commensurate with the value of the land.

Another obstacle to rapid progress is our existing procedure. It seems to me on examining the different Acts of Parliament which have been passed on this question that at various times in Committee and otherwise the House has had before it some grievance or hardship which may have occurred in some place or another and they have accordingly placed provision in the Statute to safeguard it, and the accumulated result of all these elaborate safeguards is to make the procedure extremely cumbrous and dilatory, apart from being very expensive. None of us wants to inflict hardship upon anybody, but at the same time if the House will read what I propose to issue afterwards in the form of a White Paper as a summary of the existing procedure on what we call Part I and Part 2 schemes, that is, unsatisfactory houses, they will see how cumbrous and difficult it is. The result is that it takes months to get a scheme through. It is twenty-eight years since the Act of 1890 was passed authorising this kind of thing. During these twenty-eight years there have only been thirty-two completed rehousing schemes under the Act in the whole country. During the ten years before the war there were only eight schemes completed. I am talking about unsatisfactory condemned areas. Of these condemned area schemes there were only eight completed schemes in the ten years before the war, and seven schemes which were started have not been completed yet. In some cases I know it is due to the war.

We have sufficient information now to know that many areas ought certainly to be dealt with, and we propose therefore in Section 5 to make it the duty of the authority in these circumstances to prepare a scheme. It is also proposed in the same Section that where an authority fails to prepare a scheme or to carry it out the Local Government Board may itself prepare a scheme and carry it out.

We propose that the compensation to be paid for the land, including any buildings thereon, shall be the value at the time the valuation is made of the land as a site cleared of buildings and available for development in accordance with the requirements of the building by-laws for the time being in force in the district. In the boundary street area bought by the London County Council the compensation paid is £220,000. It is calculated that the value of the site clear of buildings available for development in accordance with the requirements of the building by-laws under this Clause would be £115,000. The difference would be £105,000. The amount paid before for buildings and various interests upon it make up the difference. I think we have to proceed on this basis, that if this property is condemned as being so bad that it cannot even be patched up and must be pulled down and cleared out of the way, we ought not to be required to pay anything for it. That is the basis of the Bill.

It is proposed that the housing purposes shall include power to acquire any houses or other buildings on the land proposed to be acquired, etc., and to acquire any estate or interest in any houses which might be made suitable for the working classes, and that the local authority shall have power to alter, enlarge, repair, and improve any such houses or buildings. That is to say any town or village can, if they think it necessary, acquire any of these unsatisfactory houses or building and bring them into proper condition to be suitable dwellings.

Clause 19 deals with by-laws respecting houses divided into separate tenements. It is provided that power should be conferred upon the authorities, and, failing their exercising it, that the Local Government Board itself should have power to exercise it to make by-laws, prescribing what is required in an ordinary reasonable habitation in regard to water supply, cooking, and so forth. It often happens that the tenant might be quite willing to alter and adapt a house in this way, but the conditions under which they hold it prohibit its being altered. There was a very notable case in the Courts the other day. We provide in this Clause that in these cases where such alterations are approved, and likely to be required for

the housing of the working classes, power is taken to set aside the covenants that are restrictive of such alteration.

I now come to the proposals for dealing with new houses on open ground. I think it well that I should tell the House quite frankly what the position is.

I may say, as showing some sign of movement, that there were 418 schemes for sites on the 8th March, and during the following four weeks the numbers came in as follows: forty-one, eighty-one, sixty-five, eighty-eight. During the last four weeks we have had 275 new applications. All these schemes, so far as we can ascertain, cover sites which would provide houses to the extent of about 100,000 houses when the schemes have been completed. The sites applications which have been submitted up to the present comprise 4,620 acres, and the number of houses of which drawings, specifications and all the rest of it have been submitted up to the moment is only 6,909.

There are 1,805 authorities, and in this matter it is no good pretending. There are some only too keen to get along, and numbers of them are very keen to do so just now, I am glad to say. But still there are some that are backward who ought not to be so, and who are not very anxious to press on for some reason or other. It is therefore prescribed that where an authority, say a rural district council, does not carry out its obligations, we may transfer to the county council the power to act in its place.

There is no affront to the authorities in making this proposal. Where people do not do their duty in all walks of life we impose special conditions. Here we are prepared to find millions of money to assist in building houses, and in a certain area which shows that a certain need exists, if the authority responsible for dealing with that area is not disposed to try to meet those needs, what are we going to do? Are we to stand by and do nothing, because that is the alternative? It is clear that the only thing we can do under such circumstances is to invite somebody else to step in to do the work. We propose that it may be the county council or it may be the central Government Department. Serious duties are imposed on the authorities under all these Clauses, and I am sure, willing as they are, it will require a great augmentation of their staff and a great acceleration of their proceedings, and immense energy and enthusiasm, to deal with them. It is, therefore, all the more incumbent upon us that we should do everything we can to help.

There is, in the first place, the acquisition of land. Apart from the price of the land, the present prolonged and dilatory proceedings are often exceedingly expensive. The whole of that, I am glad to say, except so far as the decision by the tribunal, is done away with under the Acquisition of Land Bill. Whatever Members may think as to the cost of land as between a willing seller and a willing buyer the provisions of the Act, so far as they relate to costs in respect of land acquired for housing, will mean an immense saving.

When the purchase of a site is settled, after giving fourteen days' notice, before the compensation has been awarded and the other proceedings gone through the local authority may enter upon the land and begin operations. The object of that is clear. You can deal with compensation and other matters afterwards. When the scheme is approved the Government undertakes to finance it for a provisional period—we estimate seven years—during which time an annual subsidy will be made on the basis that the charge falling upon the authority of the area will not exceed the produce of a 1d. rate. At the end of that time it is to be hoped that housing will not have reverted to the pre-war cost, but that, at all events, the cost will have got nearer, let us hope, to the pre-war level; and there will then be a revaluation or resettlement of the amount, and if as a result of the examination it appears that the future annual charges to be borne by the local authorities are likely to exceed the produce of a 1d. rate, the annual subsidy for the remainder of the loan would be finally fixed at a sum calculated to cover this excess.

I have clearly got to set up machinery for satisfying ourselves, and also the local authority, that a fair rent is charged for the house in comparison, let us say, with existing accommodation of a like character, and other standards which we shall have to prescribe. I am not prepared at this moment to set up the precise machinery without working it out in consultation with the local authorities, but as soon as I can I will certainly announce it.

It is clear that in the first place you cannot expect these houses in many districts to bring in a rent which will cover the cost of construction. Our contribution is based on this, that the loss by the local authorities in respect to charges, sinking fund, and all the rest of it, after they have deducted the rents, shall not exceed a penny rate. That is the basis of the scheme for a provisional period of seven years.

There have been a number of town-planning schemes accepted, but there is a serious danger attaching to some of them under the

present law. It may happen that a considerable area has been brought under a town-planning scheme, and an owner may hesitate about, or be averse to, undertaking any buildings or alterations on that area lest they should not eventually fit into the town-planning scheme. The result, I believe, is that in some cases, instead of encouraging building in that way, they have had a sterilising effect and rather hindered development.

We have endeavoured in the Schedule to get rid of what we think is safe to get rid of, and to provide particularly that an owner shall not be embarrassed in undertaking building on his property, where it is made the subject of a town-planning scheme. We also provide that an authority may undertake, on its own motion, so to say, to prepare schemes. Up to the present it has been necessary for the authority, after various proceedings, which I will not enumerate, to get permission to prepare a scheme. You would think that a responsible authority ought to be in a position to know whether it was desirable to prepare a scheme or not, and, therefore, we authorise them to prepare one on their own account.

Colonel THORNE: And without inquiry?

Dr. ADDISON: No, there must be an inquiry.

We have, in the first place, started to approve of schemes in stages—first as to the site, then its laying out, and then the house. We are invoking the aid of architects, surveyors, engineers, and other skilled persons. It is quite clear that we have got to improvise for this undertaking a sort of war emergency organisation, because this is a great emergency arising out of the war. Therefore it is that I have got Sir James Carmichael and a number of experts to come in and join us in creating a central organisation for dealing with this matter. In order to decentralise some of our work as much as with safety can properly be done, we propose appointing a number of housing commissioners to help forward the schemes. We have divided the country into eleven districts and appointed housing commissioners and staffs, and have already got premises.

Finally, there is the proposal to keep the House and the country informed of our doings, and what is happening in respect to housing.

In respect to these regular statements or reports of progress, we hope the first will appear on Wednesday. We will also keep the public informed as to the various schemes, and they will see who has put them forward, what is the authority, and the like. I should like to say that so far as our experience goes, first in the main that those who have land and who have been asked for it by local authorities all over the country have shown a very ready disposition to make land available for houses, and in a large number of cases there is no question of any difficulty arising in this respect.

Colonel WEDGWOOD: Since I have been in the House we have had eight housing and town-planning Bills, some of which have and some of which have not found their way on to the Statute Book. Unfortunately, those which have found their way on to the Statute Book have become dead letters. I think of all these Bills this is probably the worst. These bills have all been heralded with the usual amount of profession of interest in the housing of the working classes. We have always the same picture of the horrors of the present situation, but none of these pictures are bad enough when we consider the effects upon the future of our present housing conditions. We have the same profession of interest and the same good intention of putting it all right by Act of Parliament. For instance, we have had some references to-day to the famous Bill of 1899. That Bill has been on the Statute Book for twenty years, and when last I asked about it I think there had been fifty houses built under it. Many of the other Bills have never produced any result at all. The Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909, which was so widely heralded, has had this effect, that I think the number of cases in which it has been used may be numbered on the fingers of both hands. All these Bills suffer from the same fault. They are all designed by a bureaucracy in order, by the exercise of further powers by that bureaucracy, to put the whole of the housing of the working classes right.

We have heard a great deal about the means of cheapening the purchase of land which is at present used for slum property and how under this Bill it will be procurable at rather less than half the price that has been paid in the past. The number of cases in which slum property has been pulled down under Parts I. and II. of the Act of 1890 are extremely few. I think they are less than ten. During the last twenty-nine years that that Act has been in operation Parts I. and II. have been put into operation in connection with slum property about a dozen times at the outside. Now we are going to alter all this by making it so much cheaper to get land. Is the right hon. Gentleman sure that it will make it much easier? My impression is that you will find it more difficult to get medical officers or inspectors to condemn property if the owners of that property are not to get any compensation.

There seems to be an idea that the pocket of the public is an absolutely bottomless treasury into which anyone can delve to any extent without anyone being a penny the worse. Of course, it means that if public money is spent in that way everybody in the country suffers from the rise in prices and the increase in unemployment.

Does the House really understand that, if the local authority find the penny rate, after that their responsibility ceases, but they will have the closing of all the building contracts, the inspection of the work, the fixing of the prices at which the houses are let, and the settling of everything that affects the finances of the operation? Whether the scheme is financially sound or unsound does not affect the local authority in the least. It merely affects the purse of the public which has no control over the financial operations. I cannot think that a scheme such as that would produce satisfactory results. The Bill should not be passed in that form through the House.

Although the right hon. Gentleman takes credit for the new system of acquiring slum land, he has not mentioned that, when it comes to acquiring land for new houses, this new Bill is no advance on any of the proposals that have been made in this House by Governments during the past ten or fifteen years. You still have the system of purchase, of compensation that is to be paid to the landlord, who is compulsorily turned out of his land, all working back to the 1846 Land Clauses Consolidation Act, with the exception that the 10 per cent. on compulsion is knocked off. He is still able to get compensation for severance, for the possible value that the land might have acquired in time to come, for disturbance of business, for all the hundred and one other items which are invariably brought forward in the case of arbitration, all swelling the sum total of the cost which has to be paid. Here you are at once burdening your scheme unnecessarily and unjustly with large sums for compensating people who have no right to be paid a pennypiece more than the pre-war value of the land.

I do not believe that it is possible to get any reasonable system of acquiring land at a really fair price until you introduce into the legislation of this country some system which says that the landlord should fix his own value for his land everywhere, and pay taxes on that value, and, to prevent him from putting too low a value on it, it should provide that if the public want that land for any purpose they should have power to acquire it at that value.

This Bill sets out to reconstruct the whole of the housing problem in England. It will be a far more operative Bill than any we have had in the past, because the local authorities will work the Bill and are under no liability for expense. But it has the disastrous effect, simply because it is more operative of destroying the entire private building trade throughout the country. Before the war a mere fraction of the houses, about 5 per cent., were built by public authorities. Now at one sweep you are taking on the building of houses, probably for everybody with less than £1,000 a year; the houses of everybody else will be built by the State. This absolutely destroys the private builder, because when the public authorities have *carte blanche* from the Treasury as to the expenditure they incur, the price they pay for land, and even the rents they charge.

Personally, I should hate to hand this over to a bureaucracy. I do not think that the present Government is capable of running a rag-shop, let alone the housing of the country. The alternative seems to me to be perfectly plain—to stick to the doctrines of Free Trade. Houses are not being built now, because the cost of labour and material is very high indeed, and because the rents of houses are artificially kept down by Acts of Parliament. You cannot go on indefinitely interfering with economic laws by Acts of Parliament. The fatal way in which these economic laws, when you strike them down in front, come up again and hit you on the back of the head, has never been more painfully obvious than on this question of keeping rents down artificially and thereby stopping the building of houses. I would submit to the House that there is a perfectly simple way of encouraging the building of houses and getting houses built cheaply enough for people to live in them, and yet have them let at economically sound rents. At the present time every house that is built has to face taxes. In the district from which I come they are over 60 per cent., because the rates in that district are over 12s. in the £. When you have rates of 12s. in the £ that means that every house that is built has to pay a tax of 60 per cent. on its value. If you tax anything that is made by man to the tune of 60 per cent., you will be certain of two results. In the first place there will be a very small production of the things that are so taxed, and in the second place those that are so produced will be let at a very high price indeed.

It is perfectly obvious to everybody that if you tax all the boots that come into this country, every pair of boots we wear, whether made in this country or elsewhere, will cost us more. If you tax

wheat the bread will cost us more in exactly the same way. If you tax houses your houses will cost you more. If you want to encourage building houses, take the tax off houses, increase the supply, increase competition, thereby bringing down the prices. If at the same time you take the rates off the houses, and you transfer your rating assessment from the full value of the land and buildings together on to the unimproved value of the land alone, whether built on or not, then, without adding a penny piece to the expense of property, if you untax the houses, thereby making them cheaper, and put the tax on to the land, and thereby make it cheaper—I have put it in juxtaposition like that in order to show the striking difference between the two.

Change your insane system of rating, take the rates off the houses and raise the same amount as you raise at present, but on land values. In that way you will discourage the holding up of land and thereby make land cheaper, and you will encourage the production of houses and thereby make houses cheaper. In that way without drawing upon the bottomless purse of the public, you will develop the housing of the country and private enterprise with its hundreds of varieties of ways in which it must inevitably beat the enterprise of bureaucracy will come into play and will provide the opportunity for a healthy, moral, and sane race throughout the country.

Tuesday, April 8th

Mr. SEXTON: We were told last night by the right hon. Gentleman who introduced this Bill, "I can assure the hon. Member we are getting on, and we have given an order for 5,000 million bricks." But they have not yet commenced to build. We have got the bricks, doors, and windows, but unless the right hon. Gentleman intends to build castles in the air we must have something more substantial. We want the land upon which to put the bricks, doors, and windows. That is the fly in the ointment. The land Clause of the Bill constitutes the fly in the ointment with which the right hon. Gentleman deludes himself and the House generally. If I have any quarrel with the Bill at all, it is in that regard. It leaves the evil of land monopoly untouched.

I have been bombarded in the same way as other hon. Members, with letters and documents from various vested interests calling attention to certain points laid down by the Prime Minister in his Bristol speech. These points are: (1), I am more concerned and afraid of vested prejudices than I am of vested interests; (2) take no man's property from him; (3), pay him full value for what he has got; (4), you cannot build a nation on dishonesty; and (5), security must be given for all invested capital. I subscribe and endorse every one of these sentences. They were sent to me by the Property Owners' Association asking me, when the time came when real property was attacked, to bear them in mind. I am going to do that, but in a quite different way from that intended by these gentlemen. I contend that this Bill under Clause 8 does every one of these things that these gentlemen are afraid are not going to be done. A man who builds a house creates something. He puts it on the land and adds to the value of the land. The man who owns the land creates nothing. He sits tight, and watches the community and the builder put up the houses on the land, and at the end of seventy-five years he comes along and pinches the houses. If that is not morally dishonest, I do not know what is.

We have cellar dwellings in Liverpool. I know something about them. I have lived in them. Men have to when they are employed at the docks. They are the only dwellings they can obtain very often, and there they have to live, in a fetid atmosphere, with no back-yard, with wet clothes hanging over their heads, with the whole place reeking of soapsuds from Monday morning till Saturday night, and yet for these places they have to pay a rent of many shillings a week. In Liverpool we get eighty houses to the acre, not twelve, and ground rents are paid to the ground landlord, ranging from 30s. to £4 her house. Behind the very walls of the Art Gallery at Liverpool, behind the very frame of a celebrated picture by Holman Hunt, a slaughter of the innocents is going on every day of every week in filthy slums.

Let me put this concrete case. We had in Liverpool at one time a place called Kirkdale Gaol. That was built out of bricks made from the clay dug from a field opposite, of which the annual value was about £3 per acre. I understood that the erection of the gaol increased the value of that to £2,000 per acre. A short lease was given on that valuation to a man who was to dig the clay out of which to make the bricks to build the gaol. The bricks were made, the gaol was built, and a big quarry was left. Word was sent round to the manufacturers in the surrounding districts to come and dump all the rubbish into that quarry, and for every load dumped 6d. was charged by the landlord. When it was filled up the land was sold



to the jerry builder to build houses at a valuation of £2,000 per acre. Mark the sequel! The gaol in due course was pulled down. I remember as a boy seeing them put up the scaffold on which they hanged the men outside at the time when public executions took place. The bricks from the scaffold, and the bell which they used to toll at executions, were used for the purpose of a chapel which was built and which was attended by the land jobber and the jerry builder, who joined lustily in singing the Doxology—"Praise God from whom all blessings flow." What was the result? Eventually we had to apply to the Local Government Board for £7,000 to erect an infectious diseases hospital to accommodate the victims of this horrible iniquitous thing. The President told us last night that it might be possible to put tramways down which would convey the men to the suburbs. There is not a rail laid on the tramway system that does not run up the value of the land alongside it. I am a member of the Liverpool Tramways Committee. We applied to the local landlord for a small strip of land, not wider than this House, and not a quarter of a mile long, in order to lay a double track, with a junction. The price we had to pay was, I think, £7,000. How can you expect to house people under a system of this character? You cannot repeat Port Sunlight. The philanthropy of Lord Leverhulme and Sir W. P. Hartley has made it impossible to extend that system beyond the garden suburb. Every garden city enhances the value of the surrounding land, and that is how the vicious circle runs.

The House divided on an amendment proposed by Mr. Leslie Scott to the effect that:—

"This House declines to proceed further with a measure which falsifies the hopes held out by the present Government at the General Election of a great scheme of land reform and which fails to provide a simple, cheap, and expeditious procedure for the granting of compulsory powers to acquire land and rights over, under, or in connection with land where it is in the national interest that such powers should be granted and makes no attempt to deal with the subject of compensation as a whole, and particularly with betterment and injurious affection."

The amendment was lost by 178 to 17 votes. In the minority there voted:—F. D. Acland, Sydney Arnold, Capt. W. Benn, C. W. Bowerman, S. Finney, G. A. France, Major Evan Hayward, J. Johnstone, Sir D. Maclean, Major D. W. Morgan, A. E. Newbould, A. Onions, P. Wilson Raffan, Thomas Richards, Brig.-Gen. Sir O. Thomas, Col. Josiah C. Wedgwood, A. Williams. Tellers: Mr. Hogge and Mr. G. Thorne.

Forty-nine Liberals voted against the amendment, including: D. M. Cowan, Sir H. Cowan, Sir Henry Dalziel, Sir Edgar Jones, J. Towyn Jones, T. B. Morison, J. W. Pratt, A. Richardson, Sir W. Sutherland, J. Wallace, Sir R. Winfrey, Lt.-Col. E. Hilton Young and Wm. Young.

The following 10 Labour members also voted against the amendment: J. Bell, T. Cape, T. W. Grundy, J. O. Grady, R. Richardson, W. S. Royce, T. Shaw, W. Smith, W. T. Wilson and R. Young.

## ACQUISITION OF LAND BILL

*Thursday, 10th April*

The ATTORNEY-GENERAL (Sir Gordon Hewart): I beg to move, "That the Bill be now read a second time." The object of the Bill is, as the title of the Bill says, "to amend the law as to the assessment of compensation in respect of land acquired compulsorily for public purposes, and the costs in proceedings thereon." It begins by setting up a new tribunal for valuation. It lays down certain rules to guide the tribunal in assessing the value of land. It regulates the procedure before the tribunal, and it modifies the law as to costs. It gives finality to the awards of the tribunal, subject to one appeal, and one appeal to the King's Bench Division upon questions of law. Finally, it regulates the relations between the provisions of the present measure and the existing enactments as to the assessment of compensation. The Bill confers no additional power of acquisition of land at all. It starts with the case where land is now or hereafter authorised to be acquired compulsorily by any Government Department or any local or public authority, and there is a question of disputing compensation. That question is by this measure referred to someone or other, but only to one of a panel of official valuers, and those valuers in turn are appointed and rules as to their selection in individual cases are to be made by a reference committee. That committee, so far as England is concerned, is to consist of the Lord Chief Justice of England, the Master of the Rolls, and the President of the Surveyors' Institute, and there are corresponding provisions in relation to Scotland and Ireland.

Under this Bill it is proposed that the valuers shall be debarred from private practice. There follows certain rules for the guidance of the official valuer. No allowance is to be made on account of the acquisition being compulsory—that is to say there is to be no 10 per cent., which has come to be the conventional figure under the Lands Clauses Acts, although, as the House is aware, that figure has no place in the Acts themselves. Not only is there to be no 10 per cent., but there is to be no allowance at all. That proposal, again, is not without precedent, and it is to be found in comparatively recent legislation. It was so in the case of the Small Holdings and Allotments Act of 1908, the Housing and Town Planning Act, 1909, the Development and Roads Improvement Funds Act, 1909, and in the Defence of the Realm (Acquisition of Land) Act, 1916.

The next rule which is laid down for the guidance of the official valuers relates to the general principle upon which the measure of value is to be ascertained—that is the amount which the land if sold in the open market by a willing seller might be expected to realise.

The Clause proceeds to exclude value due to special suitability in certain cases, and it further excludes value due to the use of land in any illegal or insanitary manner. I do not think I need say a word in justification of that proposal, because it is one which, so far as land taken for houses is concerned, is already to be found in the Housing Act of 1890.

Then there follows a provision as to the consolidation of proceedings on claims for compensation in respect of various interests in the same land. Nobody would deny that it is wrong that more should be paid for land in which several persons are interested than would be paid for it if there were a single owner in fee simple. Then the Bill proceeds to lay down provisions which are of the essence of the matter as to cost. One of the disadvantages of the present system, or want of system, is that those who are selling land to a public authority can, as a rule, be perfectly certain that they can fight out the question of price at the expense of the public authority. That has two results. It leads to the pitching of the price too high, and it leads to quite unnecessary expense.

Under this Bill, it is provided that, where the purchasing authority has unconditionally offered a sum than which no larger sum is awarded, the costs not merely may but must be paid by the landowner. That, it is contemplated, will be an incentive, and a powerful incentive, to the acceptance of a reasonable offer.

Finally, under the Lands Clauses Act, there is no power to require a claimant for compensation to state either the amount of his claim or the particular nature of his claim. That, in practice has proved to be a most embarrassing omission. This Bill makes it obligatory in all cases to give those particulars under penalty of having to pay the costs if the claimant fails to give them within a reasonable time.

SIR R. WINFREY: At present we have on the Statute Book the Small Holdings and Allotments Act, passed in 1908. That Act is not considered strong enough to obtain land quickly for ex-soldiers. Consequently, the Government are bringing in on Monday a Land Settlement Bill to strengthen and to add to the Act of 1908. In the Act of 1908 there are compulsory Clauses for the purchase of land of a very similar character to the compulsory Clauses in the Bill which we are now discussing. The only real difference is that, in the compulsory Clauses in the Small Holdings Act of 1908, the Board of Agriculture appoints the single arbitrator, who is a land agent of repute but a man in private practice, and I suppose it has been found, in many cases at any rate, that the awards have been somewhat excessive. In the present Bill the arbitrators are whole-time servants of the State, and in that I thoroughly agree, because I think we shall get a more equitable award than under the Small Holdings Act of 1908. The Land Settlement Bill is to provide land for ex-soldiers, thousands of whom are desirous of settling upon the land.

What is the position to-day? It is that in the best agricultural districts in England land has gone up, not only as the hon. Member (Mr. Pretyman) just now said by 25 per cent., but, in some cases, by 50, by 70, and even in certain cases by 100 per cent. The best land for small holdings has gone up to that extent during the last two or three years. The other day there was an estate for sale offered by the chief auctioneers in London, who had instructions from the vendor, who was an officer at the front, to sell it. It was in my county—a whole parish. I know this land and I know all the tenants on it. It was let at from 35s. to 40s. an acre; I do not think any rent was higher than 40s. The vendor said, "Value that estate, and I will decide to put it on the market." It was valued, by a very eminent firm of valuers, at £98,000, between £30 and £40 an acre. It was an estate of 3,167 acres, and that is a



little over £30 an acre. What happened? Before the auction bills had been got out a land speculator came along and said to the firm of auctioneers, "I will give you £150,000 for the estate." That was an increase of £52,000 over what the competent valuer had placed on the land, and it was sold. That land speculator, within a week, turned round and sold it to the Olympia Farms Company for £200,000. That was £63 an acre.

I will give the hon. Gentleman opposite another instance. St. Peter's College put up a farm in the Isle of Ely. It was a farm of 122 acres, and the tenant was renting it at £96 17s. 3d. We know that colleges, as a rule, charge low rentals, and they do not revise their rentals, or very seldom, and probably this man, who had been farming for years, had it at the rental which he had in the bad times. It was put up by auction, and made £10,690. In other words, this land, that was letting at less than £1 per acre, made £80 an acre to sell—50 per cent. over the college valuation, and the reserve they had placed on it. I wish to put this to the learned Solicitor-General. Does he propose that under the Land Settlement Bill we should purchase land at these war prices? Because that is what they are, war prices, and nothing else; whereas, probably, in five or seven years' time, we shall have land going down again to its pre-war price. I am old enough to remember that we had the same thing in the early 'seventies. The year 1874 was the high-water mark of agricultural land in my district, and I remember that land sold for £80 and £100 an acre. Fifteen years afterwards it dropped down to £40, but it has now gone up again to about the same price, and is scheduled to-day at about where it was, so far as I know, in 1874.

I want to know if the Government propose to spend £15,000,000 of the nation's money under these conditions, because I think it would be extremely dangerous to do so. Here is a letter which appeared in the Wisbech paper:—

"Can anything be done to stop the shameful abuse of their functions by the rural county councils in the matter of acquiring land for small holdings for ex-soldiers? . . . The week before last the Isle of Ely County Council purchased a 250-acre farm in the Fenland. I happen to know all the facts about this farm. More than half of it is strong clay, unsuitable for small holdings. None of it is first-rate fen soil. It was bought with three other farms by a big farmer in 1910 for about £35 an acre, perhaps a little less. Had it been bought last week by any one member of the County Council for himself it would not have made 1d. more than £50 per acre, if as much. The Isle of Ely County Council gave £80 per acre."

That farm is on what was the Duke of Bedford's estate at Thorney, and all his farms were offered to the tenants, and in some cases one farmer bought as many as three or four of the farms.

Take the neighbouring County Council in Lincolnshire, where the best land in the country for small holdings is to be found—I mean in the colony of Holbeach. Here three or four of the farmers have decided to retain possession of their farms, and they have bought them at a fair rent and offered some of them to the County Council, and one offer is £90 per acre, and I believe the farmer will get it unless we alter in some way this Clause before it becomes law. At this rate we shall soon exhaust our £20,000,000, and I have come to the conclusion that if we put ex-soldiers on the soil at the present market price of good agricultural land in these districts, giving each man ten acres of land, we shall exhaust our funds before we have found housing and land accommodation for 25,000 men.

Mr. TREVELYAN THOMSON: You cannot build houses unless you have land, and you want land at a reasonable and cheap price. The experience of local authorities who have had housing schemes is that every time they have failed because they could not get an adequate supply of land to deal with the question. Why has there been this delay in bringing forward this measure? Shortly after the War started the Local Government Board circularised authorities, urging them to prepare schemes of housing and other matters of general reconstruction in which land was involved. The Government have known since 1914 that additional powers were required to deal with this question. If they had only shown the same anxiety to proceed with this matter as they did with regard to the Military Service Bill, we should have had a Land Bill of a vital kind passed before this.

I will give an experience of my own town. To my own knowledge our housing attempts there during the last fifteen years have been hampered and held up on every occasion because of the impossibility of acquiring land at anything like a reasonable price. Though we have failed with regard to housing, we have had, and rightly, under the direction of the Board of Education, to find land for our school sites. A return given to me from our local education authority shows that during the last fifty years the land

required for public school purposes cost on an average over £1,600 per acre. No wonder that our housing schemes have failed. We have at present several housing schemes before us. We have offers of land to-day on the outskirts of our towns, and we are asked £1,000 an acre in some cases for that land. I have had turned up the rateable value of those particular sites and I find that the rateable value, in the rate book, of that land for which £1,000 an acre is asked is £4 an acre.

When the local authorities are prepared to spend the equivalent of 1d. on the rateable value—and I think that there is no authority which is not going to work that proposal and will not willingly spend the 1d. in the £ in order to secure the assistance from the Government—it is immaterial to them what the cost of the land is, because whether they have to pay £200 or £400 or £1,000 per acre for land for housing purposes makes no difference whatever. It puts a premium on extravagance so far as the cost of land is concerned.

Sir DONALD MACLEAN: No amount of discussion will alter the fact that the people of this country have got hold of the rooted fundamental idea which has been the basis of all our land laws from the very earliest time, and that is the implicit, if not expressed, principle that the ultimate owner of the land is the Crown, or the people, and that therefore any interest, however powerful or widespread, must be subordinated to the public needs and the public good. That is not the doctrine of the Socialist platform or the Radical agitator, but it is the very basis of our land laws.

Proceeding from that, let us consider the scope of this measure. It deals and is fundamental to the vast and serious problem of housing. There has been an immense amount of legislation upon this subject. Everybody knows what lies at the root of the delay, and indeed not only the delay on the part of public authorities, but the refusal of public authorities to undertake it. I agree it is cumbrous machinery, but what is at the root of it all is the awful expense. This Bill, as it stands at present, affords no relief. It is true it provides a certain amount of machinery, but the real block to anything like progress is the cost of the land. We are taking up the question of soldiers' settlement. What is it that has stopped progress in this matter in the past? It is not the desire of public authorities, but it is the cost.

Upon small holdings I speak with rather a special interest, for I had the honour of introducing into this House the Bill which afterwards became the Small Land-Holders Act for Scotland. What simply smashed that Act and made it a real "dud" on the Statute Book? Nothing but the decision of the Law Courts which gave a perfectly monstrous sum by way of compensation to the landlords. How is that going to help the Scottish people?

What is the proposal of the Government? The machinery has been dealt with. I will deal simply with the Bill. Clause 2 is the Bill. It says:—

"The value of land shall, subject as hereinafter provided, be taken to be the amount which the land, if sold in the open market by a willing seller, might be expected to realise."

The market value, and the market value of to-day. It is no use talking about how things will settle themselves in the course of a year or two. These problems are instant, and, if you are going to do any good, you will have to start buying right off, or the country will want to know why. What do they propose to do? They propose to give an inflated war value. Just see what must happen. Take a fairly large town. You have between the actual urban boundaries of the town and the really agricultural part a belt influenced by the high standard of the agricultural value, and the high standard of the urban value. What has raised the value of these tracts of agricultural land? Does anybody doubt that it is the War that has driven up the value of agricultural land? The whole thing is bloated and inflated by the War position, and the Bill actually and solemnly proposes that in these social questions, which are at the very root of our national existence, we shall hand over the results of the War as far as these values are concerned to the owners of the land. How has it been brought about? By the sacrifices of the whole community. Why therefore should the whole of the community be taxed—that is what it amounts to, a War tax—simply for the sake of those who have the good fortune to own the land? I say deliberately that the country will not have it. Unless this thing is radically altered and placed upon a basis which will appeal to the justice and fairness of the nation, then there will be much more said about it whatever we put on the Statute Book.

In housing, in land settlement, in afforestation, and in transport, who is going to come into the market? Why, every public authority in the land is going to come into the market. What effect will that have upon the price of land? There is nothing here to stop it; there are no safeguards at all. You may have the most independent men in the world as valuers, but they are bound by the words of the Act and they cannot do anything else.

Mr. SCOTT: Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman hold out any prospect of private promoters being dealt with on the lines of this Bill, this Bill being limited to Government Departments and local authorities? The other question is, What is his view of the possibility of injurious affection and betterment being dealt with under this Bill, and, if outside this Bill, what prospect is there of the Government introducing other legislation to deal with it?

Sir G. HEWART: It does seem to me, whatever my opinion may be worth, that there is a real difference between the acquisition of land by a Government Department or a public authority for public purposes, and the compulsory acquisition of land by a profit-making company. How far that difference should go is another matter, and I am not able to give any pledge or undertaking that those railway companies and similar corporations will be brought in upon the same footing. With regard to the second question, that was a question, if I followed my hon. and learned Friend—

Mr. SCOTT: If I may ask the question again, it is, To what extent the subject of injurious affection and betterment can be dealt with by a valuer under this Bill, and, if they cannot be dealt with, will the Government introduce legislation so that they can be dealt with in another Bill?

Sir G. HEWART: What was in my mind was injurious affection. My hon. and learned Friend asked a question about both of these matters. They are not quite upon the same footing. Injurious affection is an incident to the acquisition of land which sometimes applies to the property of the person from whom the land is acquired, and sometimes to the property of another owner. So far as injurious affection upon such a compulsory acquisition would establish compensation under the Lands Clauses Act, this Bill will not interfere. The valuer who values under this Act—unless I am mistaken—will also award suitable compensation. I am glad to find that one hon. Member is exhilarated by that proposition!

Mr. RAFFAN: We are exhilarated because at last we understand what the Bill means.

Sir G. HEWART: The question of injurious affection is one that will not be subject to compensation under this Bill. Betterment is a much larger and a much more difficult question. One thing is quite obvious about it, and that is that it is not a matter that can easily and conveniently be dealt with in a Bill relating to the acquisition of land. It is one of those very things that together make what this Amendment desiderates—a great scheme of land reform.

Colonel WEDGWOOD: This Bill professes to get away from the old Land Clauses Act of 1846. It does modify that Act in certain directions as has been shown, but, on the whole, wherever there is any disputed question of compensation involved, we go back to the old Act of 1846. For instance, there is the question of injurious affection, of part of the property being sold to the State. I hope the House understands what enormous prices have been paid in the past to landowners both by railway companies and by public authorities under this head, and for severance. Injurious affection and severance are still in the Government Bill. The landlord is not to get merely the price in the open market between the willing buyer and the willing seller, he is to get the price for all these fancy claims that the lawyers have built up under the 1846 Act, and which, in the past, have robbed railway companies and, through them, the public of millions of money for the benefit of a very small class. It is a Bill which will give the maximum compensation to the landlords compatible with getting the Bill through even the most Conservative House of Commons.

When we consider to what this inflation is due: that it is due not solely to the War, but to the action of Government Departments in paying an inflated price for grain, for wheat and for oats, in order to induce the farmers to plant more; that it is due to the inflated price of those foodstuffs which come from the land, inflated, in order to encourage production, by a Government Department. Then we see that it is even more iniquitous that the community should be asked to pay these inflated prices when they are purely the result of Government action. When the Corn Law was taken off, in 1847, then indeed the price of land fell, the price of food fell, and the price of agricultural land throughout the country fell. But there was no question then of compensation to the landlords on account of the removal of those duties. In a few years' time the Corn Production Act will expire and agricultural land will return to its normal level and foodstuffs will come back to their normal price. Then the whole value of agricultural land will sink certainly to its pre-war level and possibly lower. Then you will find the ex-soldiers and those who have been housed under these proposals will be saddled with debts based upon the high price of land, and they will legitimately complain that they have been forced by the House to pay these high prices and put in an unfair position in their efforts to make a living out of the land. It has been said that we

have no suggestion to make as to the price at which land should be acquired. I think we have protested often enough, and we have a perfectly simple way of acquiring land at a price fixed by the landlord himself. All we ask is that the landlords themselves everywhere should fix the value of their land, and then that we should be allowed to put our rates and taxes on that value, and if afterwards we want to acquire the land we shall take it at the landlord's own valuation. I think that would give ample satisfaction to all the landlords, and it would give absolute justice to the community. It would also be absolute proof that we were not paying more than the full value of the land, because wherever that system has been adopted no landlords are likely to put too high a value on their property.

## LAND SETTLEMENT (FACILITIES) BILL

Monday, April 14th

THE PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO THE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE (Colonel Sir Arthur Boscawen): I beg to move, "That the Bill be now read a second time."

The Bill seeks to increase the number of small holdings in the country generally, especially among ex-Service men. I believe that the small-holdings movement is a good movement and that people who say that small holdings are a failure do not realise the extent in the country districts of the small-holding movement to-day. Altogether there are 275,000 cultivators of the soil with holdings of under 50 acres, which is 65 per cent. of the total number of agricultural occupiers in the country. Of course, if you take it on the acreage, it is not so large; it is a percentage of 18. Of these 275,000 smallholders, 18,000 were created, under the Act of 1908, through the county councils.

What are the conditions that are absolutely necessary in the case of a soldier settling on the land? In the first place, he must possess industry. If anybody thinks he is going to have a soft time by becoming a smallholder he will be grievously mistaken. If any soldier thinks he is going to have a "cushy" job he will make a very great mistake. The work of the smallholder will be hard work, long work, long hours for himself and his wife. There will be no forty-eight hours a week for the smallholder, much less forty hours a week. I am not saying that in any disparagement of the industrial population, who work under different conditions—underground, in the pit, or in ill-ventilated factories—whereas the smallholder is working under the canopy of heaven, in the open air. What I do lay down most emphatically is that industry is one of the essential conditions of the smallholder. We realise that many of these men will not have the capital necessary, and one of the main provisions of the Bill, to which we attach great importance, is this: that by credit facilities we can advance money to the small settlers for the purpose of stocking their farm—for fertilisers, and so on. It will be done under rules made by agreement with the Treasury, and the suggestion is that we should give pound for pound. If a man has £50 capital, we will give him another £50 by way of advance, which can be subsequently repaid to the county councils.

We have been charged with delay in starting this scheme. It is quite true that we have not bought very much land up to the present, but we have been offered a great deal of land, and the reason we had not bought more is that we have been most careful to see that the land we did buy was suitable.

Mr. LAMBERT: How much have you bought?

Sir ARTHUR BOSCAWEN: About 20,000 acres up to date, but I would point out that until last December all sales have been stopped during the war. So far as we have bought we have been buying for our farm colonies scheme. I saw the other day an admirable scheme which showed that splendid work had been done in New Zealand, and we have had similar reports as to what has been done in Canada. But in these new countries there are vast extents of virgin soil unoccupied, and the settlement of the soldier is only part of the general settlement in the development of the country.

Another crying difficulty is the difficulty of time. We want to get this land as quickly as possible and we want to get the men settled. But look at the processes we have to go through. We have got to enter into possession, which takes time. We have to build houses, make roads, drains in many cases, put up fences—all this takes time and makes it more difficult for us to carry out the scheme. There is this third grave difficulty which I recognise that we have to get over—the difficulty of costs. I do not disguise the fact that you could not possibly embark on a scheme of land settlement at a more expensive and, therefore, more unfortunate moment than the present. We realise that, but what is the alternative? We have either got to do it and "lump" the cost or to put off redeeming

the pledge, which I think the House and the country would not tolerate for a moment. The cost has greatly increased. Hon. Members opposite, I know, will say that it is because you are buying land too dear, and they will ask, "Why do not you buy cheaper?" I agree that land has gone up in value to some extent. [An Hon. Member: "Why?"] Because the value of the produce is more. Everything has gone up. But the value of land has not gone up nearly so much as most things. Whereas the cost of living has gone up 100 per cent., my information is that town land has scarcely gone up at all. Bad agricultural land has not gone up at all, but the good land has gone up 25 or 30 per cent. Even granted that the value has gone up and that we are buying land, good land, at 25 per cent. more than we could buy it before the war, my point is that the cost of the land is the smallest item.

Although I do not disguise the fact that land has gone up to some extent, the greater extra charge is due to the extra cost of buildings, loan charges and rate of interest. Those are the difficulties we have to face. How do we propose to get over those difficulties. First of all, there is the difficulty that most of the land is occupied and well occupied. We try to get over that difficulty in this way, by as far as possible buying land which is intact, where farmers are farming their own land; secondly, by buying where there are large farms or multiple farms; thirdly, by buying land which is in the possession of the War Office, or the Air Force, or some other body which has acquired land during the war; and, fourthly, by using some of those badly cultivated farms of which possession has been taken by the agricultural executive committees. In all these ways we hope to reduce the dispossession of existing tenants to a minimum. That will be our policy.

I come now to the difficulty of time. How do we propose to deal with that? By the first two clauses of the Bill, which give us very drastic powers. When you acquire land compulsorily now, you have to get your Order confirmed after public local inquiries. For two years, during the emergency period, we sweep that away altogether. If a council, having obtained the consent of the Board in advance under Clause 9, makes an Order for acquiring the land, then, without any further public inquiry or confirmation, the Order becomes valid and the land will belong to the council, and the compensation will be settled afterwards. We enact in Clause 2 that during the emergency period we may enter into possession by merely giving fourteen days' notice. There and then a council may enter into possession and begin equipping the small holding at once. We want to begin equipping it at once, and we want to begin to build. We say that here we want the right to enter at once and build a pair of cottages in that field, and we want the right to enter there and build another pair. We shall pay compensation for any damage we do in that process, but for the rest, of course, the farmer may stay on, provided only that we may make a beginning with these small holdings. That is not all. In the event of our really ejecting a tenant there is ample compensation. We have to pay the tenant who is turned out, not only for the value of everything in or on the farm, we have to pay the cost of his removal, and we have to pay his estimated profits as from the day when he was turned out to the first day on which under his agreement he could have been turned out.

The prospective tenant is not to pay a rent based on the cost of establishing the small holding. He is to pay such a rent as he might reasonably be expected to pay having regard to the real value of the soil. In other words, the provision which is in the present Act, whereby a holding may only be let at such a rent as will recoup the council, is swept away for a period of seven years. This is how it is done: At the end of each financial year the councils will let the Board know the deficit, whatever it may be, between the loan charges they have incurred in setting up the holdings, and the rents they receive. That deficit will be paid by the Treasury out of the Small Holdings Fund each year. That will last for seven years. At the end of the seven years two valuations will be made, or rather one estimate of cost and one valuation. We shall ascertain what the holdings cost to set up, and we shall ascertain what their then value is at a proper rental value, and the difference will be wiped out, that is to say, the Board will assume payment of that part of the loan charges representing the difference or deficit and we shall then hand over to the county councils the whole of the holdings on a self-supporting basis.

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## LAND AND HOUSING

[Correspondence appearing in THE TIMES of 16th, 19th and 22nd April, following the statement in that newspaper of the Manchester case, which was also referred to in our April issue. It should be noticed that there is some divergence in the figures respecting the Anson Estate. The MANCHESTER GUARDIAN of March 3rd stated the price was £49,410, and we ourselves have had official information from the Manchester City Chambers that the rateable value was £316 5s.]

To the Editor of THE TIMES.

Sir,—The facts of the Manchester case, as set out in THE TIMES of to-day, deserve special attention. For land which was being rated on an annual value of £315, the Corporation had to pay no less than £47,800, equivalent to 126 years' purchase of the annual value for rating. Around almost all our large towns and in many country districts it is the same story; there are more or less idle lands which are being rated on low valuations, but for which ransom prices are demanded when they are wanted for building. The Acquisition of Land Bill is quite inadequate, as it does not go to the root of the evil.

The evil was recognised and the true remedy was recommended by the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes as far back as 1885, in a Report which was signed by the majority of the Commissioners, including the late King Edward, then Prince of Wales. Here is what was said (Blue-book C.4402 of 1885, at p. 42):—"At present, land available for building in the neighbourhood of our populous centres, though its capital value is very great, is probably producing a small yearly return until it is let for building. The owners of this land are rated not in relation to the real value, but to the actual annual income. They can thus afford to keep their land out of the market, and to part with only small quantities, so as to raise the price beyond the natural monopoly price which the land would command by its advantages of position. Meantime, the general expenditure of the town on improvements is increasing the value of their property. If this land were rated at, say, 4 per cent. on its selling value, the owners would have a more direct incentive to part with it to those who are desirous of building, and a twofold advantage would result to the community. First, all the valuable property would contribute to the rates, and thus the burden on the occupiers would be diminished by the increase in the rateable property. Secondly, the owners of the building land would be forced to offer their land for sale, and thus their competition with one another would bring down the price of building land, and so diminish the tax in the shape of ground-rent, or price paid for land, which is now levied on urban enterprise by the adjacent landowners; a tax, be it remembered, which is no recompense for any industry or expenditure on their part, but is the natural result of the industry and activity of the townspeople themselves."

Though this valuable recommendation has not yet been acted upon in this country, it has been applied, and was in several cases anticipated, in Australia and New Zealand. Even where rating is not on a land-value basis (as in many cases it is), there is in New Zealand and in each Australian State a proviso as to minimum valuation, of which the following provision, from section 134 of the New South Wales Local Government Act, 1906, may be taken as typical:—"The assessed annual value of rateable land shall be nine-tenths of the fair average rental of such land with the improvements (if any) thereon: Provided that such assessed annual value shall not be less than 5 per centum of the unimproved capital value of the land, whether improved or unimproved."

What we need here is a similar provision along these lines, and 5 per cent. would be more appropriate than 4 per cent. now. If the land in and round Manchester