

FOR FARMERS OR LANDLORDS?

CAPTAIN A. R. MCDUGAL submitted a paper on "Improvement of Hill and Marginal Farms" at a meeting of the Farmers' Club in the Royal Empire Society Building on October 7.

After dealing exhaustively with the farming technicalities involved, Capt. McDougal turned to the legal aspects of the question and emphasised the great handicap under which the tenant farmer labours in the shape of insecurity of tenure, and went on to criticize the Hill Farming Bill. We quote the following relevant extracts from his paper:

"The technical problem is now fairly well solved, but progress is frustrated by the legal position of the tenant farmer. The occupying owner can go ahead, secure in the knowledge that he will reap where and as he sows, asking consent of none, but doing his best. But the tenant is in a very different position.

"The improvement of hill grazings by everything, except burning, is a long-term process, and the improvement of marginal lands is the same. Both are expensive, and yet both are, I am convinced, absolutely sound economic propositions, and, more than that, they should be done as a matter of pride and duty. Anyone ought to be ashamed of a single neglected acre.

"But the tenant, mostly now from year to year, liable to eviction at the will of the landlord, must exercise caution, and he takes grave risks by carrying out big, long-term improvements. He may have a good, just landlord who would not act unfairly. But good men die and the tenant knows not who may come after. For instance, as regards ploughing out permanent pasture: No tenant can plough permanent pasture without the consent of his landlord. Note, of course, that 'permanent pasture' is not a technical term describing any particular kind of pasture. Legally it means pasture land that the tenant is forbidden by his lease to plough. The landlord very often, through ignorance or bad advice, refuses consent. Even if consent is granted the tenant has no claim for compensation for improving it, as improving 'permanent pasture' is not a legally scheduled improvement. As one may easily spend £10 per acre or more in seeds, lime and manure, it is clear that an improving tenant runs great risks in making any such improvement, as he may be forced under 'buy or quit' or other unfair pressure to buy back his own improvement or pay increased rent upon it.

THE HILL FARMING BILL

"The whole aspect to the improving tenant, legally, is one of frustration, and no widespread improvement of hill grazings can be expected until there is drastic reform of the Land Laws and until the tenant has security of tenure and until feudal game and deer interests are completely deprived of every vestige of power to interfere with the good farmer. Even now, after six years' war, game interests still dominate hill farming. Until these things are done research and science are largely wasted and farms will deteriorate.

"The Hill Farming Bill will fail because it entirely ignores the real cause of the deterioration of hill farms, which is the neglect of farming interests by the owners and bad conditions of tenure. In Scotland, and I dare say in England also, the majority of the owners of hill farms (excluding genuine farmer-occupying owners) are more interested in shooting than in farming and many are even hostile to farming, looking on their land as a mere plaything and not as a national asset which they hold in trust to be properly used.

"The Bill gives 50 per cent. grants for practically all landlord's expenditure, yet it does not enact the very reasonable corollary that if a landlord accepts State aid he must give his tenant security of tenure and stop spoiling farming by game preservation, deer and rabbits. The Bill does nothing to free the tenant from interference in heather burning; it does nothing effective to prevent a landlord demanding increased rent on account of improvements effected by free State grants, under threat of pay or quit.

"It is impossible to advise any tenant to embark on wholesale improvement of his farm and pastures unless he has a long lease of 20 years or so, and unless he takes great care to have records made at the start and watches the law carefully, so that he may reap where he sows. Unless he does so he had better leave his pastures alone as before, or he will reap a bitter reward for his zeal.

"Until these defects are remedied by enactments the pastures of Britain will never be improved as they should and much of the experimental work and technical knowledge will be left unutilised."

* * * Note.—The Bill has passed into law as an Act of the Labour Government.

LONDON HOUSING SITES

The London County Council has spent or is spending £14,000,000 of public money to hand over to landowners so that sites may be secured for the Council's post-war housing scheme.

This startling information was elicited by Mr. George House, M.P., member of the Council, and was announced by Mr. C. W. Gibson, the Chairman of the Housing Committee at its meeting on November 5.

Following are some of the land prices which the L.C.C. or the Metropolitan Boroughs are paying: At BOREHAM WOOD, Herts, £670,000 for the acquisition and partial development of three sites totalling 1,200 acres, being at the rate of £5,583 per acre. At Grays Thurrock, EAST TILBURY, £350,000 for the acquisition of 832 acres, being at the rate of £4,206 per acre. These instances are reported in *The Times* of July 31.

PADDINGTON plans (*Evening Standard*, July 25) to buy 39 acres for £1,711,000, which is at the rate of £43,870 per acre. ST. PANCRAS' purchase of 4,834 acres is estimated (*St. Pancras Chronicle*, July 5) to cost £100,000, equivalent to £20,800 per acre.

On May 29, the *Evening Standard* reported the decision of the L.C.C. to pay £775,000 for a parcel of land, but where that was could not be stated, as the members of the General Purposes Committee were pledged to secrecy. Mr. Henry Brooke, a member, declared it was "startlingly expensive and unsuitable." Thus *secretly* a vast sum of public money is voted for land purchase.

Later the facts came to light (*The Times*, October 10) about the purchase of the Hurlingham polo grounds in FULHAM, 74½ acres for an estimated expenditure of £700,000, which works out at £9,394 per acre.

When the L.C.C. met on October 8 (*Manchester Guardian*) the loans it was asked to sanction for housing schemes totalled more than £2,000,000. This included land purchases as follows: KENSINGTON, £84,545 for two sites, one in Portobello Road, and the other at Rackham Street; DEPTFORD, £162,170 for one site; areas not stated; HACKNEY, £124,080 for two sites of combined area of 10.33 acres, being at the rate of £12,000 per acre.

The land purchase in STEPNEY and POPLAR we have already reported and commented upon in our July issue—£1,714,000 for 1,945 acres, for an extensive replanning and redevelopment scheme after the war-damage there. The total capital expenditure, including land acquisition, would be £52,740,000, and it was computed that making all allowance for income from rents, about two-thirds of that expenditure will be unremunerative and be effectively lost.

6d. RATING AND TAXATION IN THE HOUSING SCENE. By F. C. R. Douglas, M.A.