

POVERTY AND THE NATIONAL HEALTH

The folly of our land monopoly can be shown from many points of view; let me bring an aspect of this national folly before your readers that may be new to many of them. Our land monopoly has driven out the people from the country and crowded the great towns with a congested population, as the following figures clearly show.

In 1851 we had a population of 8,990,819 in the Urban Districts of England and Wales, and 8,936,800 people were in the Rural Districts, or practically the same number of country people as of townspeople. But in 1911 (the last census year) the town population had increased to 28,162,936, while the country folks decreased to 7,907,556. Nobody would contend that this great change was entirely the result of our land monopoly; the great developments in industry have had much to do with this change, but it is entirely reasonable to charge against our land system the excessive and dangerous disproportion of our town populations. The country population would have increased during the same period had they been free to use the land for cultivation. Neither would anybody deplore this change if the townspeople were superior to the country people in health and stamina; but the sorrowful fact is exactly the reverse, as the following figures will make plain.

Let us begin with the babies. During the five years ending 1916, of every 1,000 babies born in the County Boroughs, 121 died during their first year, but in the Rural Districts only 87 died. Other figures tell us that of every 10,000 children born in the towns, only 7,778 are alive at the end of five years, while from 10,000 country children 8,577 are alive after the same time, or, in other words, from the same number of births there resulted 799 more funerals of the little children in the towns than was the case in the country. It might be thought that this excessive mortality only swept away the weaklings, leaving a balance of the strong and healthy; but even this modified satisfaction is denied us, for taking 1914 (the last year before the war began to leave its traces), the death-rate from all causes and for all ages was 16.1 per 1,000 living in the towns, and only 10.8 in the rural districts, which being interpreted, means that if the whole of our 46,000,000 people were as healthy as the country people, we should save about 180,000 lives per year, assuming, what is probably near the mark, that our town population is one-fourth of the whole.

This deplorable and disgraceful state of our public health is directly fostered and encouraged by the stupid system of landlordism under which we live. During the last 40 years our gamekeepers have increased from 12,633 to 17,148, and the price we pay for this folly can be partly judged from the mortality figures I have given. Landlordism is good for gamekeepers, but it is a splendid institution for the undertakers and the coffin-makers. Obviously, if we had a Government possessed of any vision they would use every means to increase the strong and healthy portion of our people, and give every encouragement to conditions tending to increase the national stamina, but, so far as our land system is concerned, the effect has been quite opposite to this desirable result. We do right to insist upon the practical solution of the wages question and the poverty problem by the abolition of landlordism brought about by the full taxation of land values, but the great improvement in public health that would inevitably result from the same measures, is an important addition even to those great reforms. "Back to the land" means many good things, and not the least would be the great improvement in the national health that would follow.

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SECOND EDITION.

"LAND OR REVOLUTION"

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RHODESIAN LAND CLAIMS

Disclosure of Secret Document

Evidence of a very remarkable character was laid before the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council yesterday when the hearing of the Rhodesian Land case was resumed.

Mr. Leslie Scott, who appears for the natives, stated that when Sir Starr Jameson (then Dr. Jameson) crossed the Mashonaland border into Matabeleland and began dividing between his followers the lands of the Matabili, he did so in pursuance of an agreement with his fellow-invaders, and not upon the basis of concession. Mr. Scott read the material portions of this agreement, the most important of which were:

That each member (of the invading force) will be entitled to mark out a farm of 3,000 morgen in any part of Matabeleland. No occupation is required, but a quit rent will be charged on each farm of 10s. per annum.

That members be allowed four clear months wherein to mark out and register their farms, and that no such marking out or registration will be valid after that time with the exception of the rights belonging to members of the force killed, invalidated, or dying on service.

The Government retain the right at any time to purchase farms from the members at the rate of £3 per morgen and compensation for all improvements. This does not include the purchase of claims already pegged out on farms.

That any member of the Victoria force is entitled to 15 claims on reef and 5 alluvial claims.

The "loot" shall be divided, one-half to the B.S.A. Company and the remainder to officers and men in equal shares.

—Daily News, April 26th.

[We shall review this case in a subsequent issue.—Ed. LAND-VALUES.]

THE "LABOUR LEADER" ON THE "GROWING DEMAND"

Once again the Government has shown itself a prisoner in the hands of the landowning classes of the country in their treatment last Tuesday of Lord Lincolnshire's Bill. As framed, this Bill was designed to prevent landowners selling their land over tenant farmers' heads at the increased values which the combined war emergency legislation and war distresses of the State have made possible. But the Bill's defeat may well prove a short-lived victory for the Land Barons. The glaring injustice of their claim should make irresistible the growing demand for a taxation on land values, which would take all such increased values for the community who created them. Only now is it realised that the recent Corn Subsidy Bill that pretended to forbid the landlord raising the rent and so robbing the farmer of his reward for growing more corn left the landlord free to sell the land.

Mr. Outhwaite recently asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer:—

Whether his attention has been drawn to the fact that the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia has secured as a war measure a valuation by owners of the freehold land of Australia, which has been disclosed at approximately £500,000,000, and if he will take steps to secure such a valuation of the land of the United Kingdom under the powers of the Defence of the Realm Act, so as to make provision for the growing financial needs.

But Mr. Bonar Law had no hope of getting money in Britain by means of a land valuation! It remains to be seen what British Labour will have to say on the question now it is thus forcibly brought to their notice. Perhaps even the farmers will wake.—*The Labour Leader*, April 25th.