

THE CORONATION AND THE "RENT CROWD"

By Douglas J. J. Owen

Coronation afterthoughts are now fashionable. Mr Bernard Shaw has given us his characteristic comments. The Labour Party has asked for greater simplicity in royal matters, and Messrs Maxton and Gallagher have gone so far in exploding the "bunkum," as Sir Stafford Cripps calls it, that Mr Churchill is quite shocked. The question debated so solemnly in the House of Commons as to whether the Monarchy is worth all we pay for it, is in reality a small point compared with a significant feature of the Coronation proceedings which seems to have passed unnoticed.

Undoubtedly, the ceremonial was symbolic, and in spite of Mr Shaw, symbolic of the existing situation and not merely of what was true centuries ago. Much has been said of the religious character of the crowning and of the exclusive representation of one of the Christian bodies of the country because it is the Established Church. Next to this element of the personnel who carried out the ritual, however, the most striking feature is that the whole affair was almost entirely the perquisite of our ancient territorial aristocracy. And this is truly symbolic of their dominance of our national life.

According to popular thinking, as well as Marxian theory, the decisive influences in our public activities are in the hands of what are called the "capitalists." Whoever they may be they were conspicuous by their absence from the front of the stage at Westminster Abbey on Coronation day. Where was Lord Nuffield or Sir Herbert Austin? Where the representative of Boots' or Burton's, Woolworth's, Littlewood's? Was the I.C.I. or the F.B.I. prominent? Were the C.W.S., or Rylands, or Cook, Son & Co., or Lewis's or Selfridge's, and their kind any nearer than one of the back seats, if there at all? Yet these are typically the forces most closely related to the life of the British people.

If, on the other hand, we notice who actually were nearest the footlights, we are struck by their relation to land monopoly. The master of the ceremonies is himself one of the largest landowners—the Duke of Norfolk, who draws a great part of his revenues from the activities of the citizens and industries of Sheffield, and who did not let his Roman Catholicism interfere with his privilege as a hereditary landlord to arrange for the Protestant Oath to be put to the King.

In the royal processions the regalia were borne by what an American writer calls the "rent crowd." The crowns were borne by the Marquis of Salisbury and the Duke of Portland; the orbs and sceptres by such dignitaries as the Duke of Sutherland, the Duke of Richmond, the Duke of Somerset and the Duke of Rutland. Others prominent in the train of the Monarch were the Duke of Beaufort, Duke of Buccleuch, the Earls of Haddington, Shrewsbury, Ancaster, Erroll, Lincoln.

It would be interesting to know the amount of the combined rent rolls of these members of the royal entourage, or alternatively, what the amount of some of their compensation claims will be under the Government's acquisition of Coal Royalties Act. The Church itself, of course, through the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, is also an interested party in our burdensome land system.

It must be remembered that in every town and city, as well as the countryside, every phase of the nation's existence will be paying heavy toll in rents and mortgages to the aforesaid rent crowd, who monopolized, not only the Coronation ceremonial, but more important

for us, monopolize the very earth on which and from which the human family must make its living. It was this land monopoly to which the late Lord Snowden referred in his 1931 Budget speech, when he said: "It has crowded our people into pestilential slums, and it has driven hundreds of thousands of people from the land into the town to compete with the town workers, with the result that wages have been depressed and unemployment has been increased."

Apart from the enormous tribute in land rents exacted by the class who ran the Coronation, even worse is their power to keep land out of use and thus cause unemployment and the low wage system. This power of withholding land from effective use would have been destroyed by the 1931 tax upon the value of land if Mr Neville Chamberlain had not repealed that tax in the interests of the rent crowd. But the House of Lords has no longer the power to block the taxation of land values if the people insist on it.

Now that the masses have demonstrated their loyalty, let them demand that the Crown, on behalf of the whole nation, shall become the rent collector of the values attaching to land, and thus, in the words of Snowden, "liberate the land for the people, and abolish once and for all the tyranny under which the people in this country have suffered."

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ANOTHER RAW DEAL

Mr W. S. Morrison broadcasts his eagerly anticipated new deal for Agriculture. Like Mr Walter Elliot's old deal, it is a raw deal for taxpayer and consumer.

For six years the bounties of price-raising legislation have been poured on English soil. Agriculture has been spoon-fed with tariffs and subsidies and quotas and marketing schemes, in addition to tax reliefs. But landlords have robbed farmers of their gains. Under-fed, because under-paid, urban populations have been unable to consume their produce. They remain too poor to preserve the heritage of the land by treating it adequately with lime and basic slag and to take advantage of the scientific development of dry grass which would end their dependence upon foreign supplies (controlled by British capitalist combines) of winter feeding stuffs. So the taxpayer will buy the farmer's lime and slag, to the great profit of private lime and slag makers. The fertility of the soil will improve, to the further profit of the landowner. Consumers will continue to be rooked and farmers to be ruined.

Additional subsidies and price-raising legislation are to be accorded growers of oats and barley. There is to be an expansion of subsidized wheat, which could be imported more cheaply from the Empire and stored to meet every emergency of national defence.

Two proposals lie on the credit side of the Minister of Agriculture's new deal. He will initiate and finance a campaign against cattle disease and he will expand drainage services to prevent land erosion. But to what end? To prevent human erosion by ensuring for the people a cheap and plentiful supply of milk and meat? Certainly not! The aim of production, as Mr Morrison sees it, is not consumption. It is profit—profit for landlords and middlemen. (*Reynolds News*, 30th May.)