

TYRANNY OF TAXATION

By FRANK BOYCE

ABOUT seven years ago, I stood upon a plot of land fronting a principal road through a town just outside London. It was a legacy to a brother, two sisters and myself. I was telling the Estate Agent and Valuer by my side what we intended doing with the site.

"If you do that," he answered sadly, "you will have to pay something like £X,000 to the Government."

"For what?" I asked, mentally staggering back a pace.

He explained to me the Development Charge of the *Town and Country Planning Act, 1947* and I could hardly believe my ears.

"Do you mean?" I gasped, "that we should be fined and punished for making this bleak spot decent and for providing the accommodation that is so badly needed just now?"

He nodded.

"Surely that charge stops development right, left and centre? It's crazy!"

He assured me that it had to be paid, mad as it appeared.

Afterwards doubts assailed me, even to the extent of remorse. Who was I, a journalist and writer in an entirely different field and abysmally ignorant of economics, to question the great minds at Westminster and those which guided them? There must be, I thought, a very good reason for levying such a charge in order to stop expansion. Trouble was I just didn't know anything about that side of life! With reluctance on the part of half the family we sold the whole plot with the old buildings upon it, and I decided to remedy my ignorance by learning something of economics.

I made a poor start by studying from a well-known school and University text book. I found that I was learning about the *mechanics* of our present system—demand, supply, prices, markets, production, division of labour, banking, insurance and the like. Skimming over this quickly to get an idea of the machinery, I started again from another angle—that dealing with men and women working together in a community from the beginning of social life. This was illuminating.

Two or three years of this in spare time and I struck Henry George's writing. Everything clicked into place; the crooked places became straight.

But having the writer's temperament, and having struck something good and new to me, I was bursting out all over with the news. When asked to say a few words at odd meetings I tried out the subject of the single tax, even in Esperanto on one occasion. I was amazed at the interest shown in this "new" idea.

During this time, on different occasions, I met four B.Sc.s(Econ.). Two of them admitted to having heard of the taxation of site values but knew nothing of the details, the other two had never heard of it.

Still bursting with the news and wondering why our national and sensational journalists could not see that our present drift towards totalitarianism and an inflation, which under our present fiscal system, must continue as inevitably as death, I started writing letters to the newspapers. Only a few were published and often the cuts made shifted the point or entirely altered the sense.

I determined, therefore, to drop temporarily my other spare time writing work, and produce a book about it. A book a layman could read easily and understand. Several visits to the late Mr. A. W. Madsen and research in libraries and photograph agencies filled in gaps in my notes. The book was written and, on the suggestion of a journalist colleague who read the MS, it is called *Tyranny of Taxation*.

The Preface is a concise factual background of our life on this planet. It deals with the space ship Earth as it was and is today showing that its surface is relatively smoother than an orange, that though millions of people have passed this way before us, the surface has hardly been scratched. There is enough for everybody and to spare. The Earth is but sparsely populated with its 2,500 million and there is evidence to prove that it would easily support 10,000 million if man would only adjust his economic life to work in harmony with nature as scientists and technicians do in developing the use of scientific discoveries.

The book proper then takes the form of a *concerto* in three movements. I am the soloist backed by an orchestra of the speeches of famous men and economic facts.

The opening movement (Chapters I and II) deals with taxation today with extracts from newspapers and magazines reporting what people "from the rich man in his castle to the poor man at the gate" have said about taxation, including many captains of industry, and its effect on everything from the stately homes of England down to the life of a labourer in a factory. It deals with the punishment meted out to those who produce for the benefit of themselves, their families, the community, the nation and the world. It covers, in its stride, how taxation on effort has increased crime, extended the grip of the football pools, has stopped thrift and even been the cause of the upsurge of "do-it-yourself." This first movement ends with a consideration of what would happen if men were not taxed on the earnings of head and hand and the products thereof.

Chapter III begins the second movement of the *concerto* dealing first with a natural phenomenon—something that has happened since the beginning of time where men and women have gathered together to live and work in a community.

It shows a sketch of a farmer's large field in the green belt outside a large town and what happens to the land when the authorities decide to build a road across it forming part of a by-pass motor road. It shows what happens when Green Line coaches and buses are routed along the new road; when the first enterprising man buys a plot of land fronting the new road to build a garage and petrol station; the effect on the second and third purchaser.

The land which could once be purchased from the farmer for £100 a plot has now gone up to £500 nearby and £1,000 on the new road front.

Later, when the several Boards lay electric cables, gas and water mains along the road the plots rise to £2,000—not, as the farmer himself says, because he has sprinkled diamonds or gold dust upon it, but because it is where it is and purchasers are willing to pay the price for it, where it is. It is worth it to them.

Other examples are given from newspaper and Estate Agents' advertisements, and extracts from speeches of famous men on this subject including those of Winston Spencer Churchill.

Chapter IV shows how we can make use of this natural social phenomenon by taxing that land value made by the community releasing men entirely from the payment of all taxes on brain and brawn, ignoring what man does upon the land, what he builds, ignoring his enterprise and industry for they are his own, his just reward, the full fruits of his labour. Extracts from recent copies of *Hansard* reveal what M.P.'s think about it.

Chapter V gives some examples of the working of the tax in domestic, commercial and industrial circumstances and its effects on the owners of property paying that one tax only—on the site value of their land.

Chapter VI deals with objections that are often raised giving the assurance which, as readers of this magazine well know, exists for every doubt, for none can think of a genuine snag in this future system.

Chapter VII, leading into the third movement of the *concerto*, views circumstances of the tax in operation, the rating of site values with extracts from the *New Zealand Valuation of Land Act, 1951*, and efforts made in this country to rate on site values instead of punishing men for improving their property or encouraging them to allow it to dilapidate.

Then follows the *cadenza* by the author showing that, though concealed, our present system of taxation is a mould into which the people are being forced by economic pressure. That totalitarianism can be achieved by taxation as by any other means, but that the adoption of site value rating and taxation will, at last, set men free. Free from every "ism" that makes slaves of a man and his mate.

Appendices, referred to in the text for those who know nothing of economics, complete the book.

In all there are 30,000 words with 15 illustrations consisting of photographs and diagrams, and having finished

the work I realised it had to go out to the people who had never heard of the cure for our economic ills.

It would be foolish, I thought, to offer it to the publishers of this magazine or to any other organisation knowing the scheme. It would merely find a place on the shelves with others of the type preaching to the converted. It should go out as a missionary into the economic jungle.

So *Tyranny of Taxation* started its rounds of the well-known publishers, and here are some comments:

"While we feel it is a most interesting subject and one which you have tackled extremely well, we also, regretfully, do not think that it is a book really suited to our rather small list."

This one is strange:

"It has been suggested that, in general, people are so disturbed by the high rate of taxation in this country that they are unlikely to spend more money on a book which serves only to arouse their wrath further."

Here is evidence that so few people know about the single tax. This is from a very well-known and old-established firm on returning the MS.:

"You have certainly got some very original ideas in it, but it is so unorthodox in my opinion that I find it difficult to advise on the best publisher."

From a large and important firm:

"... and have also had it read by a member of the staff whose special interest is economics.

"We both feel that it is an excellent essay with a good deal in it that is new and valuable. I am afraid my own knowledge of economics does not allow me to follow the full argument, but my more learned colleague assures me that the argument is fairly stated."

Now follows a paragraph that surprises me because in my own field I have always had the reputation of being able to explain a complex technical matter in such a way that the man in the street can understand it. The firm goes on:

"The trouble from our point of view is that it is essentially a book for people with real knowledge of economics, in other words, a specialized book which could not conceivably fit into our list."

From a literary agent:

"... having read it myself, I sought the advice of an economist. The argument, of course, is an extremely interesting one, but I am afraid the book would not have a sufficiently wide sale to be a profitable undertaking for a publisher."

Lastly, from a London firm known all over the world:

"Unfortunately there are at the moment too many books on economics on the market and it is unlikely that a new one would meet with success."

The truth is, of course, that the costs of book production today are so high that a publisher cannot afford to take a risk. He must be convinced that the book will sell well before he will accept it. In this lies the danger deplored in the book itself—that of the drift towards totalitarianism by the mould of taxation for, under our worsening conditions, voices other than the orthodox will at last be unheard. Yet the Treasury, unlike the publishers quoted above, does not believe that books about our plight today will not sell. It recently printed 400,000 booklets entitled *The £ and Our Future*.

As I do not believe it either, the *Tyranny of Taxation* is still on its rounds.