

## Foodstuffs for Winning the War

"SPECULATION IN FOODSTUFFS," says *The Economist*, "is plainly a crime, and speculating in food-producing land is hardly less culpable."

The staid English weekly is discussing a new defense regulation intended to prevent speculation in agricultural land. This regulation provides that where there has been a contract of sale since the outbreak of war and a notice for the tenant to quit since the end of last year, the notice will have effect only if Ministerial permission is given.

Here again we have an example of the bungling of the land question when its effect, rather than its cause, is treated. The regulation has for its purpose the nondisturbance of farm tenancy, so as not to interfere with food production during war. Speculators have been buying up land to sell for a quick profit, and have held tenants to ransom by offering them the choice between notice to quit and buying in their farms at a high price.

The regulation may prevent ousting the tenants, but it will not prevent gouging them. Higher rent will take the place of higher selling price. The tenant will have no choice in the matter, for there is nothing in the law which prevents the holding of English agricultural lands out of use. Therefore, the tenant cannot counter the demands of the speculator with a threat to farm elsewhere.

There is only one way to prevent land speculation, and that is to make it unprofitable by the public collection of rent. And that, too, is the way to get the foodstuffs needed to carry on the war.

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