

Miscellany

Speculation?

G. E. SWORDER & SONS (Bishop's Stortford) report that on November 12, acting for executors, they offered to auction two small parcels of agricultural land at Green Tye, Much Hadham, Herts, in respect of which planning applications had been submitted and refused.

Lot 1, consisting of just over $3\frac{1}{2}$ acres, was sold for £1,525 and Lot 2, $2\frac{1}{2}$ acres, for £1,125—equivalent to £435 and £450 per acre respectively.

"It is difficult," commented the auctioneers, "to find any parallel for this sort of price for land which is essentially agricultural."

Estates Gazette, December 4

Agricultural Economics

THE size and structure of the farming industry had been largely determined by Government supported policy and in the last decade the total investment in farming, much of it backed by Government support, had been about the same as the total investment in the steel industry," said Sir Richard Clark, Second Secretary in charge of the Treasury division that supervises all public expenditure, in a lecture to London University, December 1. He went on: "in spite of the heavy investment the net income of the industry is hardly more than the value of the assistance received from the Government."

The Planners Planned

A WELL-KNOWN Soviet mathematician recently remarked, "half in jest", that in two decades the whole able-bodied population of the U.S.S.R. would have to concern itself with accounting and planning if the present planning methods continued.

Tass commentator Ivan Artemov remarked: "There is a measure of truth in this paradox. The growth of production is not in the least proportionate to the growth of the planning and accounting apparatus. Doubling output, for instance, would entail a three-fold or even greater increase in the complexity of planning and accounting."

That's All!

REPLYING to a question from Mr. Russell Johnston (Liberal, Inverness) on the subject of site-value

rating and the Whitstable survey, who asked whether he would consider a tax on vacant properties, Mr. Richard Crossman (Minister of Housing and Local Government) replied: "I have seen the report and it is being considered as part of the Government's examination of the whole system of local government finance. I do not consider further surveys to be necessary for this purpose."

"I explained in answer to a previous Question that we are now considering the whole question of local government finance. The possibility of taxing site values or empty sites must be considered as part of that review. This report on Whitstable was very interesting and gave a specific study of that specific aspect. I think that this particular solution is one which has been studied enough, and all one has to do is to decide for or against it."

Too Many Eggs

AT THE annual general meeting of the Egg Marketing Board the Chairman referred to the record sales of the Board — up 15 per cent on last year — and then complained of the overproduction in the industry.

"Let anyone who doubts the value of a marketing board for eggs," said the chairman, "pause to consider what the situation would have been this year if there were no organisation that could handle effectively the surplus production . . ."

Anyone with doubts on this score, of course, would also doubt very much whether, in the absence of a Marketing Board, there would be a surplus to dispose of!

BOOKS RECEIVED

The Economics of Subsistence Agriculture by Colin Clark and Margaret Haswell. (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 30s., New York: St. Martin's Press).

History of Economic Doctrines by Eduard Heimann (Galaxy Book No. 123) (Oxford University Press Inc., \$1.50, 9s.).

The Treasury under the Tories 1951-1964 by Samuel Brittan, Pelican book. (Penguin Books Ltd., 6s.) (To be published also in hard cover form by Secker and Warburg.).

It's Gone To Their Heads

MR. GEORGE BROWN, the Government's economic overlord, at a Parliamentary Press Gallery lunch on November 18, said: "We will make decisions. We will, with God's help, be doing our best to get them right. We are in a fascinating, exciting, and slightly heady atmosphere."

Colin Clark on the Welfare State

To the Editor of *The Guardian*

SIR,—I fully agree with your leading article on "Reform of the Social Services" (November 30) in its criticism of the present jumble of absurdities and inequities. But your proposed reform, the "guaranteed national minimum" — originally Sidney Webb's idea, I think—seems to me to be a move in the wrong direction. You have not faced the problem that confronted Grey and Melbourne reforming the Poor Law in 1834, and Lloyd George introducing unemployment insurance: at what level does the guaranteed benefit begin to destroy the incentive to work and save?

If the guaranteed national minimum is fixed low, private efforts to supplement it will be futile—they will just be debited in the means test—and political pressure to increase it will quickly become overwhelming. If it is fixed high, large numbers of people will find ways of evading the intentions of the law, however skillfully it is drafted and will give up work, dispose of their assets, and live permanently on the benefit.

There is no solution to this dilemma. The way out is in exactly the opposite direction—namely, to make it possible (by paying higher wages, amongst other things) for every person to take out for himself an insurance policy large enough to make a minimum provision, for himself and for his dependants, for all the serious contingencies of life. The proceeds of this policy would be his own or his heir's personal property, so that there would be no question of his and his family's right to use all that they could earn and save in order to supplement it. He should own the policy absolutely and not receive it as a "fringe benefit" from his employer—we already have in this country too many obstacles to industrial mobility.

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