

## OBSTACLES TO ITALIAN LAND SETTLEMENT

The Italian government proceeds with its programme of land reform despite attempts, with or without Communist or new Fascist instigation, to create disorders. Riots outside Venice, at Terni, and in the Fucino have been suppressed and peasants occupying land illegally are to be prosecuted. But the confusion in the countryside falls far short of the confusion in the minds of the land-reformers, to judge by the schemes proposed. The Cabinet's Land Reform Bill proposes to deal first with all properties worth more than £20,000 (in whose estimation?). If these are intensively cultivated (in whose estimation?) a fifth (which fifth?) of their acreage is to be examined with a view to expropriation. If such estates are not intensively cultivated (to be decided by whom?) four-fifths are to be taken over. Another bill, before the Senate, concerning 50,000 acres in Calatria gives landlords compensation in the form of 5 per cent. State bonds. Yet another scheme, proposed by a land-owning deputy, is designed to spare disturbing existing owners of estates by government re-settlement of ten million acres of waste, after reclaiming it by using American money. Afterwards a proportion of cultivated land is to be returned to the land-owner in return for all his originally waste land. "Land-owners on the whole approve the idea, and some hundred and fifty support it," says the *Manchester Guardian*. That is not remarkable.

The Rome correspondent of the same newspaper described, April 27, the situation in the area ninety miles east of Rome, where the Torlonia family in 1860 reclaimed the lake of Fucino and is now rumoured to draw an income of £500,000 annually from rents, although the 35,000 acre estate is badly managed, and the canals silted and the land often flooded. Tenants and labourers strike and Prince Torlonia is disgusted with the whole business and wants to get rid of the estate. "What strikes the English visitor," the correspondent continues, "is that any land-owner in Italy can still get away with an income of £500,000 a year and that no tax system has been evolved to meet this situation. It seems ridiculous to compensate the Torlonia family for years of neglect." The government land reform pays the owners 25 per cent of the rated value of the land in cash and the rest in State bonds. "It is difficult to see," the correspondent remarks, "how the Italian Treasury could ever afford to buy the 35,000 acres of the Fucino from the Torlonia family on these terms."

The Fucino estates, as described by the *Manchester Guardian's* correspondent, comprise not only the natural element, land, but canals and other products of labour necessary to enable the land to be used. The owner of this capital is as entitled as much as any other enterpriser, to interest on his investment. Some part of Prince Torlonia's very doubtful £500,000 must come from this source and to judge from the considerable number of countries, provinces, counties and municipalities where land value taxation or rating is in operation there would be no particular difficulty in Italy in distinguishing income arising from investment of capital, from income arising from occupation of the site. By making this assessment the Italian government could lay the foundations for a land reform which would be just, effective and permanent and which could be carried out without any of the waste, disturbance and opportunities for political pressure and corruption involved in the present confused and clumsy efforts at mechanical re-distribution.

Any attempt to satisfy the grievances of the landless by mechanical re-distribution becomes patently absurd as soon as its principles are examined. If it is allowed that any landless person must be granted land then in justice every person must be equally entitled to land. On this mechanical principle the land of Italy (for example) would need to be demarcated into plots of equal area for every Italian at the time, and as another was born or any emigrated the boundaries of every one of the 50 million or so estates would need to be re-drawn. In addition, the buildings and developments on almost every estate would need to change hands under conditions in which no market value could be ascertained. One person's estate would be situated in the heart of a great city, where even a square yard is of great value; another's would be a waterless patch in the middle of a barren waste. Even if equality of land area were abandoned and equality of land value were aimed at, the same impossible conditions of redistribution of population and developments and for ever shifting boundaries would recur. The present efforts at Italian land redistribution insofar as they can be said to have any basis in principle at all fluctuate between the two impossibilities we have described.

And all the time the just and practicable solution is available if only the Italians, and those of all other nationalities, would stop to think, free of preconceived notions and (perhaps) antagonisms. The experiences of New Zealand, Denmark, Australia and other parts of the world show that the value of land—the natural element, the common property of all members of the community—can be assessed without difficulty and periodically reassessed to keep pace with changes (almost invariably increases) in value. All that is required to fulfil the requirements of justice in land is to collect this common property or common income to defray the expenses of the community; obliging every tenant or occupier of the national heritage to pay the value or rent of his site into the public Treasury, he being correspondingly relieved of the onerous burden of arbitrary and confiscatory taxation at present levied upon his labour and the development of his site.

This land reform requires no shifting of estate boundaries, no disturbance of property, no payments of compensation, no impertinent scrutiny of the enterprise of others, no opportunities for pressure groups or temptations to speculation.

F. D. P.

### IN MEMORIAM—BUE BJÖRNER

A noble life well lived—too few the years;  
Too soon the journey's end when he must rest:  
His dear ones prematurely brought to tears—  
A grievous loss to those who loved him best.  
And yet—his great call came—beyond the pale;  
Beyond the ethereal blue of cloudless sky:  
While we, still left behind the darkened veil  
Must carry on the cause he held so high.  
Unstintingly he gave of labour, love,  
Good cheer and humour to a cause sublime:  
Now must his spirit guide us from above—  
His memory will mark the sands of time.  
Though here we sorrow in perplexity,  
Joyous we'll meet in immortality.

MRS. T. E. HOLLINS.