

Land Policy in Palestine

"Land is the indispensable foundation of any human activity." With these words Dr. Abraham Granovsky starts his analysis of the Jewish land policy in Palestine. (Land Policy in Palestine, by Dr. Abraham Granovsky. Bloch Publishing Co., 1940, New York. \$2.00).

Until 1920 most of the land acquired for the purpose of establishing a Jewish National Home in Palestine was merely transferred from one private owner (an Arab) to another (a Jew), with the result that all the evils inherent in private ownership persisted and handicapped further the building of the Jewish Homeland.

During the period when no set land policy was followed speculators played a great part in the buying and selling of land, and the price of land jumped up sharply. For instance, the lands of the Sursuk family in the Valley of Jezreel were sold in 1921 for forty to eighty times the price originally paid in 1872. Another example is the price of land in Rehovoth, bought in 1890 and left uncultivated, which increased five-fold in twenty years. Knowing that there would probably be an accelerated increase in population due to Jewish immigration, land was bought by private individuals at low prices to be held out of use until it could be sold at great profits. In 1934, the price of the ground

of a suburb of Jerusalem, Beth Hakenem, sold for fifteen times the price paid in 1921. Throughout the chapter dealing with the rise in the price of land, Dr. Granovsky cites examples bearing out the restrictive effects of land speculation on production.

The first Zionist Conference after World War I in 1920, realizing this, decided therefore to pursue a land policy that would benefit the community rather than the individual land owner. From that time on, all land purchased by the Jewish National Fund, a part of the World Zionist Organization, was to be leased and not sold to Jewish settlers.

"In place of the unlimited right of disposal possessed by the private owner of land, a form of possession had to be introduced which, while giving the holder of the land

full opportunity to use the soil, reserved certain rights to the community, and first and foremost would prevent the occurrence of evils characteristic of private uncontrolled ownership. This new form also had to be elastic and allow the tenant complete liberty in conducting his affairs on the land, thus not robbing him of the incentive to improve it."

If the tenant or lease-holder wants to transfer or sell his lease, he is entitled to compensation for his investments, such as improvement of the land through drainage, removal of stones, clearing of brush, or the erection of buildings. In all leases, the rent depends upon the land values and it fluctuates accordingly so that the community and not the individual tenant benefits by any increase in land values. In other

words, what rightfully belongs to the community is retained by it.

Dr. Granovsky states that since this type of land tenure was introduced, production has increased and both the tenant and community have benefitted by the resultant higher land values. The volume is replete with information on land tenure.

Dr. Granovsky has been a student of the Palestine land problem during the past twenty years. He is also the author of "Land Problems in Palestine," "Land Taxation in Palestine" and other books on the subject.