

AGRICULTURAL LAND SPECULATION

In the House of Commons on 11th November the Minister of Agriculture made the following statement on the Government's proposals for preventing speculation in agricultural land:—

In the first place, it is necessary to distinguish between purchase of land for investment and purchase for speculation. So far as the former is concerned it is not considered that any action is necessary at the present time, especially as the Government has already announced that, in so far as land purchased may subsequently become subject to public acquisition or control, any compensation will not exceed sums based on the standard of values at 31st March, 1939.

In the case of purchases for speculation, the operator aims at a quick turnover, resale with vacant possession and the exploitation of the sitting tenant, who may be induced to pay a high price in order to avoid the loss of his farm.

It appears to the Government, therefore, that the most effective deterrent to speculation in agricultural land is to restrict the power of the purchaser to give effective notice to quit to the sitting tenant. This will also avoid the disturbance of tenants who are playing their part in the increased home food production campaign by farming their land well.

It is therefore proposed to make a Defence Regulation providing that where the whole or any part of an agricultural holding is subject to a contract of sale made since that date, any notice to quit that holding, or any part thereof, given to the tenant so as to expire at any time after the end of the year 1941, shall be null and void unless the Minister of Agriculture or the Secretary for Scotland consent in writing thereto.

As at least twelve months' notice must be given in the case of agricultural holdings (with the exception of a few short leases in Scotland), the Regulation will in general cover any case where there has been a contract of sale since the outbreak of war and a notice to quit has been given since 31st December, 1940.

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The Regulation has since been made. It does not, and cannot, prevent the real cause of speculation, namely, increase in value. It does, however, make it more difficult for the owner to realize that value.

The Regulation only applies to agricultural land, and only to such agricultural land as is let to a tenant. Where the land is occupied by the owner he is as free to deal with it as he was before.

Where the land is let and its value for agricultural purposes has increased, it would seem that the owner will not be able to get any increase of rent from the tenant, because notice to quit seems to be the necessary preliminary condition for obtaining an increase of rent. In these cases, therefore, the Regulation creates a form of tenant right or dual ownership in which the increase in land value is secured to the tenant. This is not a desirable first step towards a solution of the land question, because it creates additional vested interests in the land value which should go to the community as a whole.

Where the land is let for agricultural purposes and it has acquired an additional value for building or other purposes, the Regulation prevents the land from being used for the purpose for which it is most

valuable. Such a prohibition on use cannot be a satisfactory permanent solution of the problem.

The Regulation is in any case partial and capricious in its application, as it applies only to agricultural land and only to such agricultural land as is let to a tenant. The problem will never receive a satisfactory solution until all land is dealt with upon a uniform basis, and a distinction is drawn between the value of land and the value of the buildings and improvements. A valuation of all land and a tax on the land value is essential.

TEN ACRES FARM LAND FOR £2,000

The Buckinghamshire County Council (*Bucks. Herald*, 5th December) agreed after discussion to give £2,000, of ratepayers' money, for the purchase from Captain T. T. Drake of 10 acres of land adjoining the Amersham public assistance institution and highway depot. It was the recommendation of the Finance Committee but it was not passed without protest. Councillor A. E. Bryant asked the Council if they thought it was the proper time to spend £200 an acre for land for rural activities. Alderman Ralph Howard said no one could convince him that the land at Amersham was worth £200 an acre. If its value could be regarded as £200 an acre, the value had been created very largely by the fact that the Council already used some land pretty close to it. The land was more valuable to the County Council than to anybody else, but the Council had created the value, and seemingly had now to pay for what they had done. Councillor W. A. Walker asked if the Council could not pay compensation for the use of the land, in the same way as the War Office and Air Ministry acquired the use of land in the present emergency. He thought the price too much.

High priced land and a public assistance institution are certainly in logical juxtaposition.

THE LATE COUNCILLOR RUPERT EAST

The Chairman alluded to the death since the last meeting of Councillor Rupert East, the representative for the Northern Division of Aylesbury. Councillor East, he said, had not been a member for long, but he took a great interest in local government matters and held strong views in regard to certain matters, but he (the Chairman) felt quite certain that no one held those views more sincerely than Councillor East did. The Council stood for a moment in silence and agreed to a letter of condolence being sent to the family.

In his review of *Town and Country Planning* by Gilbert and Elizabeth Glen McAllister (Faber & Faber, 12s. 6d.) in *The Plebs* magazine, Mr R. Coppock says the authors advocate taxation of land values and he goes on to remark: "This proposal has its merits, I agree, but I can think of at least one important objection to it. If the owner is to be increasingly taxed on his land improvement or development, he will have an inducement not to improve it."

An astonishing remark to come from the General Secretary of the National Federation of Building Trade Operatives. Mr Coppock should think again. His objection is an admirable argument against the present system of rating and taxation, and in favour of Land Value taxation.

MR CHURCHILL ON MONOPOLY

I was brought up in my father's house to believe in democracy. "Trust the people," that was his message. I used to see him cheered at meetings in the streets by crowds of working men way back in those aristocratic Victorian days when, as Disraeli said, the world was for the few, and for the very few. Therefore, I have been in harmony all my life with the tide which has flowed on both sides of the Atlantic against privilege and monopoly, and I have steered confidently towards the Gettysburg ideal of "the Government of the people, by the people, for the people."—The Prime Minister, Mr Winston Churchill, in his address to the two Houses of Congress, Washington, 26th December.

It is quite true that the land monopoly is not the only monopoly which exists, but it is by far the greatest of monopolies—it is a perpetual monopoly, and it is the mother of all other forms of monopoly. It is quite true that unearned increments in land are not the only form of unearned or undeserved profit which individuals are able to secure; but it is the principal form of unearned increment which is derived from processes which are not merely not beneficial but which are positively detrimental to the general public.—Rt Hon Winston S. Churchill, M.P., at Edinburgh, 17th July, 1909.

FRIENDS OVERSEAS

By a circuitous route, twice across the Atlantic, word has recently been received from Mr Pavlos Giannelia, representative of Greece and Austria on the executive of our International Union. For several years after 1938, leaving Vienna, he had been resident in France, and lately he has been in Switzerland. He gives news of M. Daudé-Bancel and M. Sam Meyer, saying, "I am in touch with Daudé who is in French occupied territory and also with his friend who after having settled his business affairs was compelled to cease all commercial activity." Mr Giannelia mentions also that M. Emanuel Tsouderos the (Greek) Prime Minister is interested in our question, having written the preface to a publication by Mr Giannelia and there may be an opportunity to meet him.

With the United States now in the war, the messages we have had occasionally from continental friends through U.S.A. correspondents will cease. The latest of the kind, leaving America 28th October, from Mr R. E. Kiebach of Reading, Pa., enclosed letter dated 16th June, from Mr H. Kolthek in Groningen, Holland, and written on "Recht en Vrijheid" letter paper. It said simply "I regret not to be able to send you our weekly *Ons Erfdeel* (Our Heritage) because we have not published it since the first of April, 1941. We hope to republish it very soon, and as soon as we have succeeded therein you will receive our paper, for your name is placed on the subscription list."

The *Daily Express*, Irish edition, 10th December, reported that Mr J. M. Andrews, Ulster Prime Minister, said in Parliament that he was in close touch with Great Britain over legislation to prevent exploitation of land in blitzed areas.

We greatly appreciate your spirit and determination to carry on the good work, and I am instructed by my League to convey to you our sympathy and good wishes, as well as admiration for the able way in which *Land & Liberty* is written, edited and published.—S. V. S., Hobart.