

## FACETS OF THE UNIVERSAL LAND QUESTION

### VOLUNTARY LAND REFORM IN INDIA

A unique approach to the problem of the landless peasant is being undertaken in India by a disciple of Ghandi, Vinoba Bhave. Since 1951 when armed Communists killed landlords in the Telengana district of Hyderabad, distributing their property among the landless—3,000 people were killed and 35,000 jailed—Vinoba Bhave has walked 10,000 miles calling upon landlords voluntarily to give land to the landless peasants. An account of this remarkable man and of his mission was published in *Picture Post*, January 16, under the title "A Saint Walks in India," from which we quote.

"Vinoba Bhave declares, 'My preaching creates a proper atmosphere for non-violent solution of economic problems. The people will solve the problems—not I. It is up to them to get the best out of the atmosphere I create.' In less than three years, the 'atmosphere' has resulted in India's notoriously tenacious landlords parting with enough land to settle two and a half million of the nation's 50 million landless peasants—voluntarily . . .

This formidable scholar . . . talks in words that the most child-like can understand. 'One-sixth of India's people are landless. If one of you has five sons and a sixth is born to him, he will divide his property into six parts instead of five. I am asking for one-sixth of India's soil on behalf of the landless. Consider me as your sixth son . . .'

"Since September, 1952, Vinoba has concentrated on the North-Eastern Province of Bihar, which has three million landless peasants out of a population of 40 million. Here he aims to collect enough for all before the end of 1954 in a pilot project for his all-Indian goal of 50 million acres before the end of 1957 . . .

"Since he began his campaign, India's President has told him to take what he wanted from his Bihar estates; that close-fisted Moslem potentate, the Nizam of Hyderabad, has handed over an undisclosed amount of land; a single rajah has given 350,000 acres and countless tiny holders have sacrificed parcels of their minute but treasured plots . . ."

### BRAZILIAN PATRIOTISM

In the course of a recent B.B.C. broadcast talk describing a ten-week visit to Brazil, Mr. Julian Duguid said: "Paranaguá is not large, but it may soon be quite important. It stands on a coastal plain, with forest-covered mountains at the back of it; up which in crazy spirals crawls a really terrifying railway. This connects it with Curitiba, the capital of Paraná State, and so to the rich, red coffee-plantations on the borders of the State of São Paulo. In a good year, nearly £90,000,000 worth of products, mostly coffee, flow through this tiny port. Many warehouses stand by the quay, any one of which can store 200,000 bags; which at the present price of coffee represents exactly £2,000,000. Yet the town is only partly developed, and that for a curious reason. Everyone is so patriotic, so certain it is going to boom, that they put their money into land. This saves them a great deal of trouble. Instead of building houses, they wait for the values to appreciate. It seems to pay them, too. A piece of empty ground in the middle of Paranaguá is worth £5,000 an acre."

Later Mr. Duguid visited Curitiba accompanied by an American missionary: "At last we reached the top and ran into Curitiba. As its skyscrapers rose out of the

plateau, Father Austin stared at them gloomily, 'The curse of Brazil!' he said. 'Skyscrapers! Everyone puts money into towns. Why don't they improve the countryside and bring down the price of food? They need roads and water-pumps and little rural factories; instead, they are gambling in land-values. Do you know what a vacant lot was recently sold for in Curitiba? £2,000 a foot frontage. It wouldn't be more in New York.'"—*The Listener*, January 28.

### THE WEALTH OF KUWAIT

The *Financial Times*, February 4 and 5, published two articles by a special correspondent recently in Kuwait. The rapid post-war development of this independent State on the Persian Gulf consequent upon the discovery and large-scale exploitation of the Burgan oilfield is so well-known that only the briefest reference is here necessary.

Interest lies chiefly in the policy of the present ruler, Sheikh Abdullah: "The Sheikh of Kuwait is assured, under the agreement reached with the Kuwait Oil Company in late 1951, of 50 per cent of the latter's gross profits, and is receiving, at the present level of output, approximately £60 million a year. While the money is indisputably his own income, the present ruler has never given the slightest indication of treating it as such. Since the very beginning his concern has been to spend it on projects for the social amelioration of his people, and to conserve the unspent balance for the maintenance of those projects in the future." His wish is to have the finest city in the Middle East and the happiest State. "Schools, hospitals, roads, water and electricity supplies, and consumer goods of every conceivable description are now available to the inhabitants of Kuwait." Many other capital projects are in course of construction.

This immense government expenditure, combined with a rapidly increasing population—"immigrants have swarmed in from Palestine, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq in large numbers"—has given rise to vastly increased land values. While "little of Kuwait's income is spent by the Ruler to whom the accretion of wealth has entailed no visible change either in his manner or his standards of living," and while "the other Sheikhs have never asked for an increase in what might be called the Civil List," it is obvious from this special correspondent's despatch that such altruism is not general in Kuwait. "It is estimated that the Finance Department has spent about 80 million rupees on land bought from members of the ruling family, in pursuance of development schemes."

"Land values in Kuwait have, not surprisingly, rocketed in the last few years, so that rents and houses are at extraordinarily inflated levels. A four-roomed bachelor flat in a new block commands a rental of £2,400 a year, and a house which cost about 7,000 Rupees (£540) in 1949 was sold last week for 50,000 Rupees. In the *Safat*—Kuwait's main square—land values are estimated as being 200 Rupees, about £15 per square foot. Many Kuwaiti merchants have been enriched by the enhancement of property values, but some at least feel that the peak has been reached and are now selling their land in order to buy property in Baghdad and further afield."

The significance of this is obvious. Unless and until the taxation of land values is introduced in Kuwait, Sheikh Abdullah's concern for the welfare of his people and the progress of his country will be frustrated. As each new project designed to ameliorate social conditions

enriches the land-owning classes without improving the lot of the landless, bitterness will consume the Kuwaiti, and the rate of material progress will be arrested, and ultimately brought to a standstill, by ever-mounting land prices.

#### NATIVE TENURE IN RHODESIA

With acknowledgments we reprint this extract from a report by its correspondent in Southern Rhodesia which appeared in *The Observer*, January 31.

"The new Government has declared its intention of pressing ahead with the policy of introducing into the native reserves a system of security of tenure for the individual farmer, including the right to will but not to sell his land.

"This will make Southern Rhodesian native tenure unique in Africa. The development will probably be followed elsewhere, for throughout the continent the more progressive African farmers have broken away from the customary system by which the land is held in common or from a chief."

#### LAND REFORM IN ITALY

Land reform in Italy was reviewed in a special article by the Rome correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, February 1, from which these extracts are quoted.

"The relative decadence of Italian agriculture is bound up with the intense concentration of ownership. Of Italy's five million peasant families 80 per cent (4,200,000) either possess no land at all or own less than two and a half acres. Hence the redundant labour known as 'braccianti.' Only 800,000 peasant families own enough land to live on, and very few of these have the means to exploit it rationally. Landowners with more than 150 acres number about forty thousand and together own some 25 million acres . . .

"So far the Government projects of land redistribution have legislated for the division of three million acres between 250,000 families. Expropriation decrees have been issued for 1,250,000 acres, and of these 500,000 have in fact been given to some thirty-five to forty thousand families. The land reform so far has cost 470 milliard lire (£280 millions), 60 milliards of which have gone into actual land improvement . . .

"Unprejudiced criticism is beginning to come from the experts who gave the Government their technical advice (which was not always followed). The first criticism seems to be that the reform is extremely costly and that it is likely to show only a minimum return on the money which has been invested (or spent in compensation to the expropriated owners).

"The psychological results, at all events in the first phase of redistribution, are not always satisfactory. Instead of being stimulated to maximum effort, there is a tendency for the new owners to wait and see what more the Government will do for them. This phase, however, may soon be overcome. A more serious fault appears to be that the reform has operated in isolated sectors. There has been no attempt to generalize its benefits. At present these are felt by a chosen few.

"Except in those areas where important public works have been undertaken it does not appear that the general standard of living will be much affected by the fact that a few families are better off than before (always supposing they are able to make their holdings pay) . . ."

**In Sicily.** The *News Chronicle*, January 18, reports from Catania: "A wealthy Sicilian land-owner to-day shot dead the

Mayor of San Gregorio after the mayor recommended that the land-owner's estates be distributed by the land reform commission."

#### BUGANDA'S PAST AND FUTURE

The following extracts from a recent Third Programme broadcast talk entitled "Buganda's Past and Future" by Miss Lucy Mair are reprinted with acknowledgments from *The Listener*, January 28.

"When Sir Harry Johnston was sent out in 1900 to organize the administration of the new territory, he made a treaty with the Ganda which provided that Buganda should be a separate province of the Protectorate, and that the Kabaka should be recognized as its ruler as long as the Kabaka, chiefs, and people should conform to the laws of the Protectorate and 'loyally co-operate with Her Majesty's Government' . . .

"A peculiar, indeed a unique, feature of this agreement was that it introduced the freehold ownership of land. Sir Harry Johnston assumed that every person whom he found exercising authority over a piece of territory was a landlord, and so, as he thought, he confirmed their rights by giving them freehold under British law. So all the land of Buganda that was in occupation at that time was divided into about 1,000 freehold estates, and the idea that you could charge people rent for living on your land, which was unknown at the time, soon caught on and provided some people with an easy income. But it was the introduction of cotton as a commercial crop that made the Ganda the richest people in the Protectorate. It also enabled a considerable number of them to buy their own land, so that to-day there are probably 60,000 landowners instead of 1,000 . . .

"In relation to neighbouring peoples, you might say the Ganda constitute an upper class. I have mentioned the landed gentry. Then there are professionals—civil servants, doctors, not many lawyers as yet, editors—and men with commercial interests. It is noticeable that not many unskilled labourers are Ganda. In Buganda province there is a population of rather over 1,000,000, but one-fifth of these are not Ganda. They are immigrants from the less fertile parts of the protectorate and from neighbouring territories, and it is they who are the unskilled labourers, for the Public Works Department, the railways, the Buganda Government's public works, on the one or two plantations in Buganda, and on the land of Ganda owners. Some of them hire plots and grow their own cotton; sometimes they combine this with wage-labour. About a quarter of them come with their families and say they want to 'learn to be Ganda': that means to buy a patch of land and settle down. Not nearly all of them succeed. The others expect to go to and fro . . . The Ganda do not want to admit them as a permanent addition to the population, living on their own holdings. They do not think much of them—they call them lazy and dirty, an inferior type. 'We couldn't marry people like that', the Ganda girls say. Have we not heard something like this before? Where are we—on a settler's farm in Kenya, or perhaps even in the Transvaal? Perhaps these questions are not as much questions of difference in race as some people assume . . .

"The Ganda share with all African people the belief that most white men in Africa are anxious to get more African land into their possession—a belief that history seems to them to justify only too well. In 1945 a small area of land was needed for the extension of Makerere College, and as the owner was not willing to sell, the

Ganda Government passed a law enabling it to acquire land for public purposes. The Ganda Prime Minister had been warned that if the law was passed he would be shot; and he was, the next day. It is an alarming precedent for any Ganda authority who might take an unpopular line . . .

#### LAND TENURE IN TONGA

*Picture Post*, December 19, published an extraordinarily interesting exclusive report from Tonga received from their correspondents Fyfe Robertson and Thurston Hopkins, travelling the royal route ahead of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh. We print the following extract to supplement the article published in *LAND & LIBERTY* last August: "The most important fact in Tongan life is the land system. By ancient custom every male Tongan is at 16 entitled to a holding. In modern Tonga this means eight and a quarter acres in bush and small holding in town or village. This "tax allotment" entails a poll tax of 32 shillings a year and a rent of a shilling an acre in theory—in practice, much more. Without land the Tongan way of life would be impossible, and one of the wisest things done by Tupou the First, Queen Salote's great-great-grandfather, founder of the dynasty and of modern Tonga, was to forbid the sale of land. *It is still forbidden.* Tongans can never be reduced to landless dependence and economic subservience by the alienation of their soil.

"But the idea does not always work out in practice. There are Tongans without land, and many in the more crowded islands with less than eight acres. Indeed already, if everyone had their due, there is an overall shortage of 25,000 acres. With the population rising some 1,300 a year this is a problem that will have to be tackled. But even where land is available, it is often not allocated by the nobles, those 33 who hold almost unquestioned power in a rigid feudal society. They keep the land because it is power: and among mild skulduggeries practised is the letting of much land to one man on a sharecropping basis, which the high price of copra (the meat of coconuts) makes very profitable.

"On paper, Tonga is a democratically-governed constitutional monarchy. In fact, it is a church-ridden, constitutional, benign, totalitarian state. Tonga's rulers are determined to have no democratic nonsense interfering with entrenched privilege. The Queen appoints her Ministers from among nobles. She heads the Privy Council. Parliament, meeting one month in the year, is a rubber-stamping shop where seven elected people's representatives face seven nobles' representatives, and the Ministers, also nobles. If they should pass a bill the Queen does not like, she does not sign it.

"The power of the nobles rests on their possession of land. They are entirely dependent on the Queen's favour. For though titles and inheritance come to the eldest son, both have to be conferred anew in each generation by the Queen; and an unworthy son (and presumably a rebel against authority) might not inherit. The Queen can disenable, too. There is thus a perfect, unified, streamlined, highly filtered instrument of privilege. Every link in the chain can be depended upon. For every lesser privilege needs the favour of a greater.

"If the Queen is above criticism, the nobles are not. This criticism is strongest among young educated Tongans who fill lower administrative posts. But grumbles against the power, despotism and selfishness of some of those who own large estates are not hard to discover. It is

easy to see what privilege-creating privilege rests in a man who owns, say, 10,000 acres in a kingdom where only land gives security, and where land is becoming scarce. It is safe to say that as a money economy replaces traditional self-sufficient subsistence, as wage earners increase, as education progresses, the privileges and powers of the 33, and of lesser chiefs too, will be more and more questioned: and that if social struggle ever darkens peaceful Tonga, it will be over land!"

#### A TANGANYIKA ENQUIRY

The *Manchester Guardian*, November 28, published a report from its correspondent in Tanganyika that a Land Tenure Adviser is to be appointed by the Tanganyika Government to inquire into the many varieties of tribal land tenure which exist and make recommendations on how they can be improved.

The Governor, Sir Edward Twining, told the Legislative Council that nothing was more important to the African than land. If they were to continue to have a contented population in Tanganyika, it was essential to have a land policy which would ensure stability and security to the occupiers—particularly those legally occupying land but as yet having no formal leases—and also make possible the best utilization of land. Those who occupied land must remember that it was not only rights they needed, but they had responsibilities to ensure the land was properly used.

The Member for Land and Mines, Mr. A. H. Pike, told the Council that the Government recognized the dominant part that land played in the African mind, and realized that Africans were concerned at present about security of tenure and the certainty of land for future requirements. It was hoped to quiet the Africans' land fears, and as a first step the Land Tenure Adviser was being appointed.

#### REPORTING FROM KENYA

LAND VALUE TAXATION IS SOLUTION SAYS A MEMBER OF THE PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION.

*Reynolds News*, February 28, published an article by the Rt. Hon. A. G. Bottomley, M.P., a member of the Parliamentary delegation recently returned from a month's fact-finding visit to Kenya. Mr. Bottomley, Labour Member for Rochester and Chatham, and former Secretary for Overseas Trade, wrote: "Land hunger is a problem which must be faced. It cannot be solved, however, merely by depriving the Europeans of the lands they farm, although in many cases it is true that Europeans do not use their land to the best advantage.

"In the case of the Africans, however, although they occupy much good land, their conservative methods of agriculture and their obstinate refusal to adopt up-to-date reforms makes their problem of overcrowding even more acute. Land should be available to competent farmers of whatever race.

"We feel that the way to make the best use of land by all communities is by the taxation of land values. This means that land which is not being fully utilized will still be subject to tax. This will provide an incentive to better farming and provide money for important social services.

"A tax on land values would be a substitute for the poll tax, which is inequitable because it applies equally to the impoverished African and the wealthiest landowner."

[This is apparently an individual view. In our next issue we will comment on the official report itself.—Ed., L. & L.]