

HIGH RENT CRIPPLING FARMERS

OFFICIAL RETURNS for 1938 show 42,200 fewer farm workers in employment in England and Wales and 87,000 acres of farm holdings abandoned. Yet farmers throughout this period received £52,000,000 in State aid, including derating valued at £15,000,000, wheat and sugar beet subsidies totalling £13,000,000, assistance under the Milk Marketing Board of £3,000,000, and beef and bacon quotas accounting for £21,000,000. This gigantic sum represents an average of more than 30s. a week for every agricultural employee.

With the nation paying nearly the whole of his wages bill, with protected markets and with prices artificially maintained, why cannot the British farmer, who works long and hard, contrive to keep afloat?

The answer is to be found in one word—rent. Subsidies and doles can never improve the lot of the agriculturalist unless measures are taken to prevent them from being pocketed by the landowner in the form of higher rentals and increased land prices. As long as rents can be raised to skim off all surplus yield over and above that needed to provide a bare living for the farmer and his workers all attempts to help the farmer must inevitably end in helping the landowner.

Although a considerable section of the farming community continues to clamour for greater protection and higher prices, many agriculturalists are recognizing the evil of the rent racket and are urging rent control or nationalization.

Another rapidly growing group, headed by Mr A. R. McDougal, who farms a thousand acres in Scotland, is pressing vigorously for the taxation of land values. Appreciating that high rents and high land prices are the outcome of artificial scarcity of land, caused by the withholding and misuse of millions of acres of the country's finest farming areas, they demand that such dog-in-the-manger conduct should be made unprofitable by the imposition of a stiff tax on the value of all land.

If, they say, all land values were so taxed, irrespective of the use to which the land was being put, all possible agricultural land, including thousands of acres immediately surrounding towns, where transport difficulties would be practically non-existent, would become available for use. The resulting increase in the supply of land in relation to the demand would automatically bring rents down.

More food and cheap land, not scarce food and dear land, are what both countryman and townsman need. Only a measure which aims at increasing consumption, not reducing production, can bring both prosperity to the agriculturalist and plenty to the great mass of the people.

[From a statement issued by the Land Values Press Service of the (Labour) Parliamentary Land Values Group, and published in a number of papers.]

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RISING VALUES IN THE WEALD OF SUSSEX

IN THE course of an article on farming in the Weald of Sussex (*Daily Mail*, 17th September), Mr Pat Murphy says:

For a while after the war those grass lands were relatively cheap. A nice little farm of from 70 to 100 acres with a decent enough house could be bought for £1,500. There were dozens to be rented at £1 an acre and even less. Then came a period when the long international monetary collapse caused lack of confidence in all manner of investments, and people from the cities began to buy the land in the Weald, so that their money could not blow away. Some of these people came to live on the properties they had bought. Doctors, solicitors, City men, people of some substance, filled a few of these one-time farmhouses, and a certain development followed their coming.

The value of the weald land began to rise at an extraordinary pace. I could name little farms that have come into the market during the past, say, five years, first at £1,500, later at £2,500, and are now as high as £5,000.

With the return of prosperity, some of the increases in values have been spectacular. Needless to say, a great number of farms are owned by people who do not make their living by tilling their land. But the interesting fact is that with all that is said about the dangers and risks of farming, a good farm, if put up for sale to-day, is sold in a matter of hours. And I cannot think of a farm that is to let. Ten years ago they were nearly all to let and few were for sale.

THE ONLY FARMERS DOING WELL TO-DAY

MR H. SCOTT PLUMMER, Mainhouse Farm, Kelso, wrote in the *New Statesman and Nation*, 24th September:

The situation which has been created by the piecemeal quota-subsidy policy of the present Government is just the worst possible for long-term improvement. At the present moment all the help the farmer is receiving in subsidies is going into the pockets of the landlords on the one hand, who are enabled to keep up rents, and to the farm workers on the other, who have a fixed wage. If nothing at all had been done for agriculture the tenant farmer would have been in nearly the same position as he is to-day, as rents and wages would have fallen to an economic level.

The only farmers who are doing well to-day, other than those in some specialized branches, are the very ones who should be discouraged, i.e., the subsidy hunters, who happen to get a farm cheap and then farm it out, and the stock raiser with a stock-exchange mind who benefits by the alternating optimism and despair and buys and sells his stock at the right moment.

It is a tragic experience, living in a district of traditional good farming, seeing agriculturalists being forced into farming practice which they know to be wrong for their land because high farming and the intelligent use of the plough in maintaining fertility and growing good grass no longer pays.

I would like to suggest to anyone interested in Mr Easterbrook's advocacy of alternate husbandry at its best that they should make a tour of the south-east of Scotland before it is too late, to see what could be done in many parts of England if good farming was encouraged and bad farming penalized.