THE HOMELESS—POLITICAL PAWNS

IN SPITE OF the overwhelming evidence that rent control and (almost) unchallengeable security of tenure for unfurnished houses, rooms and flats has resulted in unfurnished accommodation disappearing from the market (to the frustration and anger of those the Rent Act was supposed to benefit), the Act was extended to cover furnished rooms.

As a predictable result, the supply of private rented accommodation has been cut by more than half in the last twelve months. But that is not all. Eight per cent of that which is left, in London, reports the *Daily Telegraph*, June 23, is being let to "foreigners" only. This is because landlords consider foreign tenants less permanent, more able to pay a higher rent and less likely to appeal to a rent tribunal for a "fair rent" after taking up residence. Rich Arabs, coloured people and students are now the preferred tenants.

Meanwhile, homeless families are being housed in hotels at enormous expense, while others tramp the streets in near despair. Mr. Freeson, Minister of Housing, has refused to call an independent inquiry into the effects of the Rents Acts—although one wonders what good this would do anyway. The effects are obvious for all to see.

The Labour Party's determination to have as many people as possible in state housing is of course behind their plan to destroy the private-rented sector. Without this overriding motive the Labour Party would not even be that stupid. The Community Land Bill is another plank in the consolidation of state control over housing and building. Thus it is that economic arguments, pleas for more individual freedom and responsibility and appeals for just plain common sense, fall on deaf ears.

We have often hoped for a government that would do the right thing in the land and housing sphere. Now, a government that did absolutely nothing would be regarded as a Godsend.

The Correct Challenge to Marx

ROY DOUGLAS

ONCE there were people who considered that intellectual ideas were the genesis of political change; that what the thinker thinks today the man of action will do tomorrow. That view is less popular now; but it retains this element of truth. Circumstances do arise when everything seems to be going wrong; and in those circumstances the men of action often turn to ideas which happen to be flying around, and adopt them - not because those ideas are necessarily the most appropriate, but because the man of action is so busy acting that he can't think out any better ideas of his own.

For this reason, it is exceedingly important to build up a climate of intellectual opinion which favours ideas which do happen to correspond with fundamental economic laws. In order to achieve this object, one must produce a corpus of academically respectable works consistent with those laws. As I understand it, the function of the new ESSRA Discussion Papers is to contribute towards the creation of such an intellectual climate. The ESSRA papers should do - for some period far ahead - what the Fabian Tracts of the turn of the century did for the period immediately after 1945.

If that view is correct, then Fred Harrison's booklet, *Marx, Economic Growth and Land Taxation* (ESSRA Discussion Paper No. 2; 50p) must be applauded as an important step in the right direction. The lines on which Fred Harrison argues will not astonish those who know him. Marx's analysis was wrong, while Henry George's was right. He makes another point, however, which - while a logical corollary of the first - is seldom stated with any clarity. The human misery and exploitation which accompanied early industrialism was not necessary for human advancement:-

> "A society transformed along the lines proposed by Henry George would have retained the ancient social character of traditional communities, symbolically represented by the shared ownership of land and the mutual aid which that implies. And it would have released the creative abilities which were latent in individual citizens (scientific, technological and entrepreneurial), without which the industrial transformation could not have been accomplished."

In other words, it is not necessary to accept Marx's bleak proposition that the path to human progress necessitated the creation of a ground-down, disaffected, industrial proletariat who had "nothing to lose but their chains", followed by the further misery and disruption of a revolution. With a just land system, we could have had all the advantages of technology much sooner than we did. Collapse of the Hegelian Triad, discomfiture of Dialectical Materialism.

It does seem to me that the actual examples chosen should have been examined at rather more depth, and with reference - if possible - to primary sources; furthermore, I am not convinced that the Meiji Revolution in Japan is necessarily a happy example. The important thing about the Paper, however, is the new approach which has been applied, and the implied suggestion that we should begin to evolve a "Georgist analysis of history". If we are right in what we have been saying, then there is not the slightest reason why this should not be done.

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STANDING ROOM

AN Ipswich councillor wants people to be buried standing up to save valuable land. The scheme has been rejected once by the environment services committee.