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EDITORIAL

Signal Red For Danger

EXPROPRIATION without compensation may shortly become a plank in the Labour Party's programme. A proposal on those lines appears in the policy statement, *Signposts for the Sixties*, which the national executive committee is to submit for adoption by the party conference at Blackpool in October. It relates to vacant urban building land and is part and parcel of the scheme to nationalise land on which building or rebuilding was authorised.

A Land Commission would buy at a price based on its value for existing use. From this it follows logically (although this is not stated) that a nil "price" would be paid for vacant sites, however valuable. This would be flagrantly unjust.

As we never tire of pointing out, the speculative withholding of land from use is dangerously anti-social and should be ended forthwith as should all trading in the people's birthright, the land, and the private appropriation of its community-created value, the proper and only source of public revenue. The only way to end these wrongs is by imposing a straightforward tax on the value of all land. But until that policy is fully applied so that the exchange value of land is extinguished, public authorities must in equity pay full market price for any land they require whether it is held by a small occupying freeholder or by a large absentee speculator.

The proposals for nationalising building land are reprinted on another page. They are found to be as earlier predicted and noted here two months ago. It will be observed that the authors blandly disdain any estimate of the possible cost of their scheme and do not indicate how it would be financed. Nor do they explain how, with the market destroyed, the Land Commission would be able to determine the existing use price of land to be paid on compulsory acquisition. Also unexplained is why it is thought necessary for the Commission to act as purchasing agent for local authorities and whether it would sell to them at cost or at a profit or a loss.

The scheme would assuredly retard development; freeholders of obsolescent buildings ripe for redevelopment would hold back, waiting for a new government to come to office and unscramble the whole foolish regime as the Conservatives had to do with the development charge provisions in the 1947 Act.

The assertion that the public revenue would steadily increase under this scheme is mere wishful thinking and quite untrue. The Commission would be able to recoup only future increases in land values. For decades and generations to come incomes from that source would be required to pay for the land compulsorily acquired.

The scheme stands condemned because, *inter alia*, it would add enormously to the national debt and present taxation, would leave private individuals in enjoyment of the greater part of the rent of land, though in a different form, and would enormously increase the power of the state over the individual. It would put an end to land speculation, it is true, but only in a vindictive, discriminatory way likely to generate the very gravest political stresses.

A Bolt From The Blue

NO longer will the Conservatives be able to pretend that land use planning is an insuperable obstacle to introducing the land value policy or that it destroys the case for incentive taxation. Mr. Geoffrey Howe has killed that excuse stone dead. As editor of the Conservative Bow Group's journal, *Crossbow*, his views command respect in Tory circles. His article in the summer number, *Can Conservatives Plan?* is open to criticism on various grounds but the following passage, despite certain obvious blemishes, is most welcome:—

"There remains what has been described as the 'Achilles heel' of planning — the problem of compensation and betterment. Parliament recognised this problem in its simplest form almost three hundred years