

THE LAND QUESTION IN PARLIAMENT

Basic Cost of Education

According to MR. G. THOMAS (Lab., Cardiff W.) the Cardiff City Education Committee recently purchased 20 acres of land at a cost of £800 per acre for the site of a school to be built in Lady Mary Road, Cardiff. He asked the Minister of Education, January 21, what contribution her Department would make.

MISS FLORENCE HORSBRUGH said that if she was able to approve the purchase of the site the loan charges incurred by the local authority would be taken into account for main grant under the Education (Local Authorities) Grant Regulations, 1952.

Every penny spent by the Cardiff City Corporation on municipal services such as roads, lighting, drainage, sewerage, water supplies, medical, cultural and social services, etc., has added to the value of this land to the advantage of the so-called owner who can now demand from the community £16,000 for permission to use it for community purposes. Meanwhile, deprived of the land value revenue to which it is entitled, this great city has to seek the central government's approval of its choice of a site and to look hopefully for financial assistance; for a share, that is to say, in the proceeds of the central government's robbery of industry, trade and wages.

Carlton House Terrace

MR. R. R. STOKES (Lab., Ipswich) asked the Minister of Works the total area of Carlton House Terrace on which it was proposed to build the new Foreign Office; how much of this area had been so far acquired; and how much had been paid for it.

SIR D. ECCLES (in a written answer, February 3): The total area of the site of Carlton House Terrace is about 3½ acres. The Commissioners of Crown Lands are the freeholders. No part of the freehold has been acquired by my Department. The leaseholds of Nos. 17, 10 and 11, representing an area of about ½ acre, were acquired in 1948 and 1950 at a cost of £114,500.

Fattening For The Kill

Protectionists who campaign for Britons to be fed as far as possible from Britain's acres, regard as a threat to the nation's larder every house, school, factory, hospital or building of any kind that is erected on farm land, or on land that could be used for food production. But to MR. W. F. VANE (Cons., Westmorland) goes the distinction of implying that food production is more important than road safety. Mr. Vane asked the Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation whether he was satisfied that the normal scale of work on widening roads in country districts and improving visibility on corners was not unnecessarily extravagant in its demands on agricultural land.

According to the "House of Commons, 1951," published by *The Times*, Mr. Vane is a landowner, chartered surveyor and land agent.

Victims of Land Monopoly

For the past twenty years the widening of the stretch of the main Leek Road between the lime kiln and the Milton Cross Roads in Stoke-on-Trent has been under consideration. During that period two children and eight men have been killed and 304 men, women and children have been injured. The Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation, MR. HUGH MOLSON, gave this information in a written answer, March 3, explaining that "the war and subsequent financial stringency" was responsible for the delay in widening this dangerous road. It is pertinent to enquire whether the cost of acquiring the necessary land is responsible for this dreadful toll of human life and happiness. In the interests of home food production, will the matter receive "consideration" for another decade or two?

Where Free Land Prevails

Coal which comes from colliery refuse dumped into the sea or from submerged outcrops can be salvaged from beaches by anyone. No records are available of the quantities obtained or values.—MR. L. W. JOYNSON-HICKS, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fuel and Power in a written answer, January 25.

Provided that the beaches are not privately owned, here is one occupation in which men may reap the full fruits of their labour, however meagre. But there's the rub—so many beaches are in private ownership.

In Tanganyika—Africans Dispossessed

MR. OLIVER LYTELTON, Secretary of State for the Colonies, in three parliamentary written answers, March 29: "Three hundred and thirty Meru families were removed from the Sanya area in November and December, 1951. Some moved to the resettlement area prepared for them at Kingori, but many preferred to settle with relatives in other parts of the Meru Chiefdom. About 400 families have now settled in Kingori, but it is not known how many of these are former Sanya inhabitants.

"The whole of this land, comprising about 5,800 acres, is now being farmed by Europeans on 99-year leases.

"Serving Government officials may acquire land subject to the approval of the Governor-in-Council and to satisfactory assurance that it is required for purposes of future residence or farming, and not for speculation. Normally, approval for the acquisition of land is only given to officers in their final tour of service, and where it is expected that they will, on retirement, become permanent residents in the territory."

In Nyasaland—Land Bought for Africans

MR. J. JOHNSON (Lab., Rugby) asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies if he was satisfied that the land owned by the Livingstone Bruce Estates, British Central Africa Company and others in the Blantyre District of South Nyasaland was being fully utilized, and what unutilized land he was taking over for controlled settlement by Africans. According to his information approximately 30 per cent of those plantations was not being used.

MR. J. FOSTER, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Commonwealth Relations, replied that the Minister was not "altogether satisfied" with the land situation in Southern Nyasaland but hoped that it would be possible to "secure co-operation with the owners."

Some indication of the nature of that "co-operation" was given by MR. O. LYTELTON in reply when asked a similar question by MR. J. HYND (Lab., Accrington) last December 2. The Nyasaland Government had purchased 300,000 acres of undeveloped land held in freehold. He was considering with the Governor what further steps might be taken to ensure the best use of the Protectorate's land resources and claimed that this vast land purchase—amounting to nearly 470 square miles of Africa for the use of Africans—was "a practical step which we have been able to take and which we expect to extend."

MUNICIPAL TAXATION QUESTIONS

New Valuation Lists Further Postponed

MR. H. MACMILLAN, Minister of Housing and Local Government: I have just made an Order postponing the coming into force of the new lists until April, 1956. While the revaluation could be completed at an earlier date on the present basis, I consider it essential to simplify the statutory procedure for appeals and to provide for certain other improvements, such as a new method of rating Gas Boards before the lists are finally deposited. There is not sufficient time in the present Session for the legislation required.—March 11.

Improvements Fined: A Conservative Protests

MR. R. GRAHAM PAGE (Cons., Crosby) asked the Minister of Housing and Local Government, March 9, whether he would take steps to prevent the disincentive to desirable development resulting from the policy of increased assessments for rates when a shopkeeper improves his shop-front. Was he aware of the concern expressed by a number of chambers of trade at the abandonment of development of this kind by shopkeepers for fear of bringing increased rate liability upon their heads? Did he not think that there was a case for treating this type of development as exceptional to the general rating rule?

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry, MR. A. ERNEST MARPLES replied. "Under rating law, if an improvement to a shop or other property appreciably increases its rental value, then its assessment has to be increased." Answering Mr. Page's two supplementary questions, Mr. Marples said; "I should think that if it applied to shops it would have to apply to everything else."

Selective exemptions such as Mr. Page suggests would throw a further burden upon other ratepayers, notably house owners, who already suffer the "disincentive to desirable development" and who similarly go in "fear of bringing increased rate liability upon their heads." However, Mr. Page, a newcomer to the House, performs a useful service in drawing attention to the absurd and vicious effect of taxing improvements, the more welcome since it comes from the Conservative benches.

MR. DONALD WADE (Liberal, Huddersfield W.) had the last word on the matter. Did not the hon. Gentleman agree that the entire basis of assessment is fundamentally wrong, and that it is most unfortunate that where a shopkeeper or any other owner of property improves his property the consequence is that the rates go up?

Privileged Farmers and Manufacturers

MR. ERIC FLETCHER (Lab., Islington E.) asked the Minister of Housing and Local Government what representations he had received from the Metropolitan Boroughs' Standing Joint Committee urging the abolition of derating, and what reply he had made.

Replying, MR. MARPLES said that the Minister had received representations in connection with the review of the Exchequer Equalization Grant urging the abolition of the derating provision of the Local Government Act, 1929, and had replied that he could not regard such a change as a necessary preliminary to further consideration of the review.

MR. RALPH MORLEY (Lab., Ithen) asked when the Minister would take measures to put an end to the derating of agricultural and industrial properties. Had he noticed that nearly all local authorities had had to raise their rates during the forthcoming year? If he was not willing to consider the abolition of derating what additional source of revenue did he propose to place at their disposal?

MR. MARPLES: "The issues are continually under consideration."

MR. E. W. SHORT (Lab., Newcastle-upon-Tyne C.) said that Newcastle loses the equivalent of a 1s. 6d. rate through derating and receives nothing by way of compensation from the Rate Equalization Fund.

MR. G. THOMAS (Lab., Cardiff W.) said that repeal of derating would mean a reduction of 3s. in the £ in the rates in the city of Cardiff.

Exchequer Equalization Grants

MR. A. BLENKINSOP (Lab., Newcastle-on-Tyne E.) asked the Minister of Housing and Local Government (March 16) if he would make a statement about the redistribution of Exchequer Equalization Grants. Because of the further delay in revising rating assessment local authorities, including the City of Newcastle, were being put in the greatest difficulty because they did not receive advantage from any such grant. Would the Minister give some temporary easement to authorities that were in that position?

MR. ERNEST MARPLES, Parliamentary Secretary, answered that full replies had not yet been received from local authorities' associations. In any case Newcastle did not now receive an equalization grant nor would it under the recommendations of the committee that had examined the problem. Asked by SIR T. MOORE (Cons., Ayr) whether he was convinced that the equalization grant system was an improvement on the old block grant, and whether he would allow his Department to think again on the old lines, Mr. Marples said: "We are thinking again on this question. No satisfactory solution has yet been found, but my right hon. Friend is giving great consideration to it."

Total rates for England and Wales for the current year are estimated at £378 millions.—MR. E. MARPLES in a parliamentary written answer, February 16.

MAKING FOOD DEAR

Apples, Mushrooms, Flowers and Tomatoes

By profession SIR ALFRED BOSSOM (Cons., Maidstone) is an architect, but as the representative of a Kentish constituency, he takes a considerable interest in agriculture and horticulture. He asked the President of the Board of Trade, February 3, if he would restrict the import of foreign apples during the main period of marketing the home crop, either by prohibition for that time or by imposing specific duty to prevent the large-scale imports of these foreign apples free of duty at a time when such imports destroy the market for home farmers.

A month later (March 4) Sir Alfred addressed questions in similar terms to the President. Would he take steps to regulate mushroom imports from Eire? Would he review the tariffs on cut flowers and pot plants in accordance with the suggestions already put to him by the National Farmers' Union; and if he could not revise them before the forthcoming summer, would he see that imports do not exceed those of 1953? Was he satisfied that the revised tariff on imported tomatoes would prevent a recurrence of the "serious position" regarding these imports which arose last summer?

Replying, MR. PETER THORNEYCROFT said imports of foreign apples are restricted for balance of payments reasons: the N.F.U. application for the imposition of a duty to protect domestic producers during their marketing season was being considered. *Mushrooms*: to impose *quantitative* restrictions for the purpose of protection would be contrary to the Government's general commercial policy. *Cut Flowers and Plants*: N.F.U. applications to revise tariffs are under consideration; meanwhile current import arrangements will be maintained. *Tomatoes*: The tariff is the *proper* method of protection and should prove more satisfactory for all concerned than the arrangements in operation last year.

Branded Cauliflowers

SIR THOMAS DUGDALE, Minister of Agriculture, in a written parliamentary answer, informed SIR ALFRED BOSSOM (Cons., Maidstone) that an application for an Order in Council under the Merchandise Marks Act, 1926, to require imported broccoli and cauliflowers to be marked with an indication of origin had been received and was being considered in accordance with the procedure laid down in the Act.

If such application is granted will cauliflowers and broccoli resemble sticks of seaside rock, their country of origin indelibly stamped from crown to stem? The dissipation of labour on such futility in a world where millions live on the brink of starvation is an outrage against humanity and reason—a further indictment of privilege masquerading as "protection."

Anglo-Japanese Trade Encouraged

"In the recent agreement, the Japanese undertook to maintain their imports from the United Kingdom at not less than the 1953 level, and we secured specific quotas for wool yarns and manufactures, motor cycles, whisky and confectionery, for which the Japanese had made no provision in their current import programme. *The Japanese tariff on most classes of wool cloth is 20 per cent, on motor cycles 30 per cent, on whisky 50 per cent and on confectionery 35 per cent ad valorem.*

"Imports from Japan into the United Kingdom in the second half of 1953 decreased by £3.5 million below the first half; but within the total there were increases in some groups of which the main ones were grain and flour, wood and timber, raw silk, seeds and nuts for oil, and manufactures of wood and timber. These are mainly raw materials and semi-manufactures and do not compete with United Kingdom products to any extent."—MR. D. HEATHCOAT-AMORY, Minister of State, Board of Trade, H. of C., February 23.

Irish Trade Frustrated

MR. R. A. BUTLER, Chancellor of the Exchequer, told LIEUT.-COL. H. M. HYDE (Cons., Belfast N.) that during the past three years approximately 9,000 seizures were made by Customs officers in Northern Ireland for non-payment of duty. The goods were practically all from the Irish Republic and consisted mainly of cigarettes, tobacco, nylon stockings, motor vehicles and sugar.