

siderable fear and trembling to let them have the 8½ acres belonging to Mr Bates but the Committee refused because they thought it was too much money. A question elicited the reply that the price asked was that fixed by the district valuer, £3,000 (the rateable value would not be more than that of the cottage, probably less than £15.—Ed., *Land & Liberty*). Councillor Killingworth objected to the proposal and pleaded delay because land prices were likely to go down. He argued in favour of secrecy in the matter of land purchases, it being "a well known fact that as soon as it was known that property was required for a public purpose the value went up 50 to 80 per cent."

The Parents' Association of the High School had sent in a letter stating that the present premises were totally unsuitable. They were unhealthy, badly ventilated and unsafe, and the accommodation was inadequate. The children suffer. The Education Committee does not fear for them. It is put into a state of fear and trembling by other considerations and is advised to adopt cowardly disguises when the question is how to get a piece of necessary land for the children's sake.

## TAKING POSSESSION OF LAND

### The Defence Regulations

THE EMERGENCY Powers (Defence) Act, 1939, provides in Section 1 Subsection 2 (b) as follows :—

"Defence Regulations may . . . authorise (i) the taking of possession or control, on behalf of His Majesty, of any property or undertaking; (ii) the acquisition, on behalf of His Majesty, of any property other than land."

We quote this provision especially for the benefit of a number of our American readers who have written us to ask whether it is true that the British Government have taken power to "confiscate all property except land." They have seen such statement in their newspapers and some columnists, who have somehow arrived at a completely false interpretation, have expanded upon the partiality of the British Government towards land ownership and land monopoly in this country—even in war time that institution is held sacrosanct. A San Francisco news contributor based his essay on the subject on a statement in the *New York Times*. Another journal, using quotation marks, but without giving the source, has it that "Any property or any undertaking whatsoever, except land, may be seized at any moment's notice by the Government." True enough that our British Government has done its best to support the landed interests, against the interests of the people; but in this particular provision it must be excused of sin.

The Regulation means that the Government may take possession or control of any property including land; but that in taking power to acquire, that is to purchase, any property, land is excepted. This is a wise precaution because it will obviate any large scale land purchases at the monopoly prices which the Government would be bound to pay. It prevents what might have been a huge land racket, if owners had been able to demand payment of the market price by the Government. Where it is a question of taking possession of land for defence purposes, the only compensation the Government need pay is the rent which the owners are now deriving from it. When the land is no longer required for defence purposes it will revert to the owner, and nothing will have happened to prevent the operation of land value taxation, when that does take effect, applying to land holdings everywhere.

## MR WINSTON CHURCHILL ON THE PEOPLE'S BUDGET

EXTRACTS FROM Mr Winston Churchill's *Autobiography* have been appearing in the *Sunday Dispatch*. The instalment published on 19th November had some interesting observations on the Budget of 1909. Mr Churchill refers to the great majority with which the Liberal Party was returned to power in 1906 after having been out of office for many years. They found however that their legislative programme was obstructed by the House of Lords, which seemed determined to throw out all Bills to which the Conservative Party objected. The Liberal Government could not pass any controversial legislation and the Party system was in danger of breaking down because the Tories used the House of Lords as a permanent instrument for blocking the activities of their opponents. In these circumstances Mr Lloyd George introduced the Budget of 1909 "which was virtually a political programme in itself. It contained proposals for the taxation of land values which were indeed a decisive challenge to the House of Lords." The constitutional tradition for many years had been that the House of Lords had no control over finance, but on this occasion, under the guidance of the Conservative leaders, they rejected the Budget. This was, as Mr Churchill says, "a terrible political blunder" which "relieved the Government from defending their own record, and enabled them to lead all their forces to the attack on the veto of the House of Lords." As a result the Liberals, although they lost seats, commanded a majority of 120 at the General Election of January, 1910, which was maintained in the election held in December of the same year. Mr Churchill's view is that the Liberals would have been defeated but for the course taken by the Conservatives. We do not accept that view.

The Liberal Party would probably have won in any case because it then appeared to be determined to do something to destroy privilege and establish equality of economic opportunity. Where the Liberals went wrong was in not applying this principle consistently. The Budget of 1909 was riddled with compromises and concessions which made it almost unworkable. It did not provide for one uniform tax on the value of all land, but for four inconsistent taxes which fell partially and irregularly. It did not provide for a straightforward valuation of land apart from improvements, but required improvements to be valued and at least four different values to be ascertained in each case. If it had established merely a valuation of land apart from improvements, and a tax on that, the whole system could have been in operation before the war broke out, and the subsequent history of the country might have been very different.

## CAPABLE OF CULTIVATION

Sir W. Womersley for the Ministry of Agriculture, answering Mr Shinwell in the House of Commons, 14th December, said he was not in a position to give a precise estimate of the area of land which was not being cultivated but was capable of cultivation. It was an extraordinary admission in view of the vast sum of public money which is spent at the Ministry to "take care of agriculture." County War Committees, however, said Sir W. Womersley, had been set up for ensuring the maximum possible production of foodstuffs; and powers had been given to local authorities to take possession of uncultivated land in or adjacent to their areas for the provision of war-time allotments.