

NORTHERN NIGERIA LAND SYSTEM

As a result of the recommendations of the Northern Nigeria Lands Committee the system of land tenure in Northern Nigeria was placed upon a rational basis by the Land and Native Rights Proclamation, 1910, which has since been repealed and re-enacted with some amendments by subsequent ordinances. The leading feature of this measure was to give to individuals a right of occupancy which would establish complete security of tenure and property in the improvements made by the occupier while retaining for the community a rental based upon the unimproved value of the land, revised from time to time to take account of variations in the land value.

The system of government in Northern Nigeria was that of indirect rule through the native chiefs, and that is still in operation. In our March issue we reprinted from the *Journal of the Royal African Society* a valuable note on the "Development of Land Tenures in the Gold Coast," by Mr A. J. Loveridge which among other things raised the question of the wisdom of continuing the policy of indirect rule in that part of West Africa. The subject is so important that we think it useful to make the following quotations from Mr W. R. Crocker's *Nigeria: A Critique of British Colonial Administration* (published by Messrs. George Allen and Unwin, 1936) which, while praising the principles of the land legislation, also throws doubt upon the adequacy of indirect rule to secure the just and adequate implementation of the legislation.

"Lord Lugard's fame and the success of his book, *The Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa*, put Nigeria on the map, and the men who had been officers in the Service there from the early days now saw themselves as the makers of history. They were then in the saddle and were not slow to appreciate their old merits or their new opportunities. The simple and healthy linking on of an ideal to an expedient was elaborated into an occult science. Indirect Rule became a formula as hieratic and as dead of creative development as an outworn theology. In fact a theocratic oligarchy closed the canon, refusing any addition to their scriptures, "the interpretation of which was their own monopoly"; and Indirect Rule degenerated firstly into a systematic glorification of a number of able but unscrupulous careerists, secondly into the practice of preserving at all costs the status and power of the families of the hereditary Emirs and chiefs, and thirdly into an undue preoccupation with Islam and the Emirates to the neglect of the Pagan peoples. From time to time a Lieutenant-Governor (until 1931 the Lieutenant-Governors of the Northern Provinces were little interfered with by Lagos, being *de facto* Governors of Northern Nigeria) would speak *ex cathedra*, his utterance being transmitted within sealed confidential envelopes to the administrative personnel, thus giving birth to a corpus of *hadiths*. The principle of Indirect Rule, indeed, was saved from being openly discredited only because most of the simple elementary government required there, notably away from the various headquarters, went on without overdue attention to the externals of the principle and

because the Land Policy (dating from Lugard's time),* and the impossibility of European settlement being undertaken in such climate, had preserved the economic independence of the people. It is not possible to put one's finger on a single contribution or new idea or new development in the administration of the policy of Indirect Rule in Nigeria since Lugard's time. Numerous innovations there have been; but they either were of trifles (though always loudly advertised trifles) or of sheer perversions. Lord Lugard's own sense of loyalty would probably force him to deny this strongly, but nevertheless the verdict of the future historian, no doubt, will be that Lugard was not well served by his successors (most of whom were his promoted subordinates).

"The impossibility of directly ruling millions of Africans makes a temporary delegation of power to native authority inevitable; thus in Kano over two millions are ruled by nine Europeans. This, in general, and if adequate supervision be forthcoming, need be no bad thing. In general, indeed, it is a good thing. But it is not the most important aspect of government. Land tenure; weight of taxation; the presence or absence of a compulsion to work for the white man; education;† in short, the question of the economic independence of the African is

* Broadly speaking, land cannot be alienated in Nigeria; it is owned by the Government in trust for the natives. See relevant Ordinances; also good general account in Buell's *The African Native Problem*.

† All these important subjects received Lord Lugard's attention, notably taxation and land tenure, and in such a way that neither of the latter constitutes a real problem in Nigeria to-day. It is unfair to Lord Lugard to associate his administrative work solely with what is called Indirect Rule.

"WHITTLING DOWN OF LIBERAL PRINCIPLES"

The following letter from Mr Ashley Mitchell of Huddersfield, appeared in the "Yorkshire Observer," 21st July, 1943:—

Having returned from the Liberal Conference I have now seen your issue of 16th July containing the account of M.J.L. of the proceedings on the first day. Your contributor rightly states: "There was some liveliness . . . due in part to lack of time to discuss the many amendments. . . . In part also it was caused by the insistence that there must be no whittling down of deep-rooted Liberal principles, particularly Free Trade and the taxation of land values."

Your readers, not having the conference agenda before them, would not easily see that the whittling-down was just what did happen. The Free Trade resolution commits the Liberal Party only to "The progressive elimination of restraints upon commercial intercourse between nations," i.e., the amount of Free Trade which Protectionists say they would accept; in other words, not Free Trade for Great Britain whatever other countries do.

On the "Land and Housing" resolution with its seven clauses to which there were about thirty amendments, discussion was severely restricted, starting at 4.30 p.m. and cleared, under the guillotine, at the end of the Session at 5.30 p.m., in order to clear the stage for a full-dress debate next morning on a mere degree of State control for industry.

The Land Value Taxers were only allowed two speakers; at least a dozen others were wanting to speak, but the official resolution was bludgeoned through; result, the Uthwatt proposal to purchase building rights outside towns was adopted, a compromise was offered of a tax on the site values of other land, as if public opinion would ever be likely to approve

much more important than what particular administrative machinery is used for carrying out the will of the Suzerain. For, let it not be forgotten, the Suzerain does not and cannot abdicate its will, and clashes are frequent and are bound to be frequent between that will and the desires of the native authority.

"To maintain law and order is so elementary and obvious a function of any government of any sort that it need not be discussed here. In any case it calls and for many a year will call for no difficulties in Nigeria. To maintain the economic independence of the native—a task of a different category—is essential. Throughout British West Africa (allowing for certain small local exceptions), and throughout much of British Africa, this again will be easy, as the land already belongs to the natives and, in general, there is no undue pressure of population on it. In a country that must be primarily agricultural, and its people, therefore, farmers, a social system of free peasantry should remain our constant care. We can easily avoid in Africa the immense evils of Indian peasant life and still more of European proletarian life. "The grand achievement of our regime in Nigeria, in fact, far eclipsing Indirect Rule, is that the land is still unalienated, and that every man can till his own plot if he wants to and dispose of his time as a free man in his own way. But this, too, will make no great call on the efficiency of government. The lines have already long been drawn in Lugard's land laws, so that all that will be required will be to follow them with such adaptations as may be called for from time to time."

purchasing the building rights at one side of a road and taxing them at the other side, for boundaries must come somewhere. The dictum of Lord Oxford at Huddersfield in 1925: "It is impossible to draw a line of demarcation between urban and rural land" was conveniently forgotten.

In the official resolution there is also a complicated and unworkable scheme for rating of site values, which no Land Taxer was prepared to consider seriously. The official speaker for the resolution tried to prejudice the Conference against the Land Taxers as obstinate theorists but in spite of that atmosphere the main amendment was only defeated by 72 votes to 59 in a House that had shrunk by the rivalry of the tea table to only a fraction of full size. I protested strenuously against such an important vote being taken at such a stage.

Thus the whittling-down was completed and the policy of the Liberal Party was made so innocuous that those who separated ten years ago, particularly on those two questions, will now find no obstacle to re-union, but what of those who have loyally supported the Liberal Party for land value taxation and Free Trade? It seems to me impossible, feeling about it as I do, to continue holding any representative position in the party.

Twopence Each. LAND VALUATION AND LAND VALUE TAXATION IN DENMARK, by K. J. Kristensen, Chief of the Danish Land Valuation Department; THE CRIME OF POVERTY, by Henry George; UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE LAND, by W. R. Lester, M.A.; MOSES, by Henry George; THE NEW POLITICAL ECONOMY, by John B. Sharpe. Also (by Henry George): SCOTLAND AND SCOTSMEN, THOU SHALT NOT STEAL, and THY KINGDOM COME.