

as it is—has bogged down. The local officials are bright, earnest, and industrious. But somewhere high above them fraud, dishonesty, and inefficiency have crippled the undertaking.

Mindanao, the southernmost island of the group, contains vast, undeveloped resources. There are fertile valleys that have hardly been touched. Thousands of acres could be turned into model farms. That was the purpose of Lasedeco, and there is still hope among the local officials in Mindanao. But the resettlement efforts have been grinding slowly to a stop.

When the word spread that these valleys would be open to settlement, hungry speculators filed claims to the land and by that act placed a cloud on the title to every acre in the project. Higher-ups in Manila co-operated with them to keep their claims alive. They succeeded in paralysing the whole operation. Before titles can be given, surveys must be made. Lasedeco has been operating twelve years and few surveys have been made; no titles

have been issued. The speculator stands behind the government official, controlling his action. The speculator wants money to have his cloud to the title removed; and the public official, directly or indirectly, supports him in this position. Quirino has taken some measures to crush graft. But corruption is still rife. Many Philippine officials still believe in rehabilitating themselves before rehabilitating the country . . .

Back in Manila, I talked with Magsaysay about this problem. He cursed the inefficiency and corruptness that prevented the surveying of the land and the issuance of titles in the Lasedeco projects. Exactly the same conditions almost defeated his resettlement programme with Edecor. Magsaysay adopted bold and energetic measures. He sent the Army engineers out to make the surveys; and by shouts and threats he forced the issuance of land titles without payment of tribute to anyone. Magsaysay, honest as he is courageous, said to me:—

“The Mindanao land-distribution project is a scandal. There should be a house cleaning, starting from the top.”

OUR POLICY EXPLAINED TO EAST AFRICANS

Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya Colony, has levied its rates exclusively on the (capital) value of land apart from buildings since 1921. There and in other urban areas in the Colony the practice has stood the test of time and has proved so beneficial that it should now be extended to the rest of the country. Yet there is a move afoot, so far as the Nairobi County Council area is concerned, to adopt the English practice of taxing improvements. The implications of the proposed change and the desirability of levying County Council rates on land values were well stated in an extensive letter contributed by one of our readers in Kenya, Mrs. Margaret C. Layzell, to the *East African Standard*, March 11, from which we quote:—

“I hope that all ratepayers will give this very important matter their earnest consideration as it is one which will affect the prosperity of the county and country more deeply than may at first sight appear. In fact all country dwellers of all races should study the question, as other rural areas may in due course follow the lead of the Nairobi County Council, even Native Land Units . . .

“Urban ratepayers are to be congratulated on the wisdom shown by their advisers in the past. There are few other countries in the world so enlightened.

“The results of this policy are seen to-day in the splendid buildings which adorn our towns and amaze our visitors. Could such buildings have arisen if they had ‘attracted’ basic rates according to their value? This happens in England to-day where the addition of even a bathroom ‘attracts’ an addition to the rates on a building.

“I believe that no thoughtful person would deny that the system of rating unimproved sites values is largely responsible for the stimulus given to the development of our towns. It is now suggested that in the rural areas of the County the exactly opposite system should be adopted, but, in the opinion of many who have made a lifetime study of the question, the principle of rating unimproved sites values is just as applicable to rural as to urban properties.

Mau Mau in Kenya, L. & L., May, page 52. We regret that in condensing Mr. Saldji's reply to Mr. Llewellyn we inadvertently sited the Sotik Club in Nairobi. Actually it is some considerable distance from that city.

“If a landowner pays a basic rate assessed on the unimproved value of his land, he is encouraged to erect good and durable buildings and to make the best possible use of his land. He is also discouraged from being a mere speculator holding up the land for a higher price. Since the amenities provided by the rates and the activities of the community benefit the owner of idle land or under-developed land and increase its value, rates should be paid accordingly.

“In this country it is comparatively easy to assess the value of property as every transfer is, I believe, recorded in the Register of Titles and a reference to these records would help to check the value as stated by the owner, who would be rated on the agreed value and not on his buildings, fences, coffee trees or any crop. Thus an absentee or non-resident owner, would pay a contribution to the exchequer at the same rate as a resident one, and this is as it should be as his property is increasing in value owing to the services provided by the County Council and to the pioneering work done by his neighbours and the community . . .

“Ratepayers for their own sakes should not be lulled into indifference by any idea that the amount to be collected is so small (£20,000 for the whole county) that it does not matter what system is adopted. It may be small to-day, but rates have a way of increasing and what will the amount be in 10 or 20 years' time? A £5,000 house may this year pay only £10 if the rate is one-fifth of one per cent, but in a few years' time may easily be paying £50, while the equally valuable undeveloped land next door will be paying only a ‘minimum rate to be agreed by Council’ which may be virtually nothing. (But apparently no one knows on what principle this ‘minimum rate’ is to be agreed.)

“Another point to be considered is the line to be drawn between agricultural land and building land. How can the former be exempted from rating without the latter? What is merely agricultural land to-day may be valuable building land tomorrow when roads, railways, water and electricity are supplied by the activity of the community.

“The simplest and fairest system is to rate all land according to its unimproved value with periodical revaluations at reasonable intervals. It is obvious that such a system encourages people to build on their land or to develop it in other ways and this is surely the aim for any county, town or country.”