

LAND & LIBERTY

Editor: V. H. Blundell

JANUARY, 1962

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EDITORIAL

THE New Year is the time for taking stock, so let us consider the position of the individual in this modern state of Britain, and assess his chances of fulfilment within it.

Superficially, life in Britain today would appear to give some grounds for satisfaction, particularly to the investigator who returns to this country with memories of pre-war conditions with which to make comparisons.

He would note the undoubted absence of obvious poverty, of cold, ill-clad and hungry children whose parents either earned a pittance or suffered the degradation of being "on the dole." Nor would he see those groups of youths at street corners who, at nineteen or twenty, had never known a day's employment, who had become too dispirited, too debilitated by poor diet, even to attempt a blind revenge on an indifferent society by individual acts of robbery or violence. (The crime figures have multiplied during our alleged affluence and are far higher now than ever they were in the "hungry thirties").

Freedom of Women

Other things which might be entered on the credit side of the account would be the improved educational opportunities, the abundance and popularity of public libraries and the public's growing interest in museums and art galleries, music and the theatre. Another possible sphere for rejoicing might be in the greater freedom of women and their active participation in public affairs, from Parliament downwards, in the recognition of their enhanced status and their increasing influence in all walks of life.

Our observer would find improved conditions of employment in almost every branch of industry and commerce, in payment and working hours and in conditions of safety and comfort. He would undoubtedly note the

general improvement in physical health, the comparative absence of epidemics and the (almost) free provision of medical and social services.

On the whole, the majority of people appear better housed and a far greater number enjoy the benefits of labour-saving, even luxury, gadgets than ever before in our history. He would derive some satisfaction no doubt from the improved standard of the popular Press and the growing numbers of readers of quality newspapers and journals; also in the large numbers of intelligent young people serving in the ranks of the political parties and in the various movements of conscience and social service. An all-over picture, then, of a healthy, well-clothed, well-fed, well-paid and happy people!

But does this picture stand up to a deeper and more serious examination: how have these apparent improvements been achieved? What does it all cost and who is carrying the burden?

False Prosperity

He soon discovers that all the apparent prosperity and progress is based on a colossal "never-never" plan, a mountain of debt; that, while education, public libraries, welfare and medical services are "free" and housing comparatively cheap for a large number, the annual cost of all these things is reflected in a national and local authority budget that has multiplied itself almost four times since before the war, even allowing for currency inflation. Moreover, although we are taxed at a rate higher than anywhere else on earth, the National Debt is rising year by year and has now reached the appalling total of £27,000 million. In that sphere of the economy where the nation is supposed to earn its living in order to maintain these fictitiously high standards, he is confronted with the knowledge, either whispered or spoken aloud, that it is becoming well-nigh impossible for British industry to compete in world markets, and that only by maintaining prohibitive tariffs against foreign exporters can it sell its goods on the home market. (The tariffs, of course, have to be paid for by those who buy the goods—a process known of old as "taking in each other's washing." It might equally well be known to-day as "buying your right to a job.")

Intractable Housing Problem

Everywhere in industry he finds that employees, under the pressure of mounting taxation, the rising cost of living and the depreciation of money, are forcing increases in wages and disrupting the flow of production, only to find that the small gains conceded are soon neutralised by further rises in the cost of living. He finds whole industries, like agriculture and fisheries, existing to a large extent on subsidies paid for by the taxpayers, and a transport system providing an indifferent service on an annual loss of millions of pounds.

In the field of housing he discovers that many of the slums he remembered—those not already demolished by

Hitler's bombs—have disappeared and been replaced by the modern conception of family *lebensraum*, the tower block and other versions of the human rabbit warren. Here the children no longer play in the streets but alone in tiny concrete balconies or in unattractive concrete playing areas—unless they are put into day nurseries while their mothers go out to work. Some of the luckier ones on council estates have actual houses to live in, with gardens and pleasant surroundings, and their rents are subsidised by neighbouring ratepayers. The people whose business it used to be to build houses to let have gone out of business because it is no longer profitable or because of the fear of ultimate nationalisation. Local councils, with waiting lists of thousands, are beginning to close them because they cannot afford to pay the astronomical prices demanded for land despite the obvious need these lists represent. Our investigator's satisfaction at the general improvement in physical standards and the skill and availability of medical services can hardly fail to be depressed by the calamitous increase in the figures for the mentally sick and suicides, and the rising tide of crime and delinquency.

Illusory Progress

If he takes a look at the class structure of British society and the question of who owns the wealth, our observer can gain little satisfaction from the fact that we have practically eliminated the landed aristocracy only to replace them by the new class of "top people," the success-men, whose success is based perhaps to an even greater extent on the private appropriation of land

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values and privilege than was the wealth of their predecessors. And what of the freedom enjoyed by the ordinary woman in our society today? It is soon obvious that this is due not so much to her emancipation as to the sheer economic compulsion that drives her to add her income to her husband's in order that the family may live. And of what value are increased educational facilities and a climate of heightened cultural awareness if, sooner or later, the economic crisis forces society as we know it to collapse? Suppose Britain, being no longer able to meet her liabilities, is declared bankrupt: her creditors, after recovering from the shock and licking their wounds, might decide to set her up in business again—under strict management and control somewhat on the lines of that which no doubt passes for economic and social life in East Germany today.

Future Prospects

So our observer now finds a rather different picture from the one presented at first glance and is faced with a most depressing outlook. Nobody in a position of influence in Britain today seems capable of pointing the way off this path of doom. What are we offered by Government spokesmen? Fantasies of an average working-class wage of twenty pounds a week within the next decade, exhortations to increase exports while everything is done to make this impossible, manipulations of the machinery of credit deliberately to depress internal trade, steadily increasing taxation and more and more power to the bureaucracy and, finally, in desperation, the flight into the waiting arms of the state capitalist cartels of Europe via the Common Market. What are we offered by the politicians of any party? Extreme socialism on the left to gradual socialism on the right. Liberty and justice both casualties, wherever you turn.

Yet the picture is not all black. Around us there are signs which encourage hope. In Britain the success of the Rating Reform Campaign and the serious attention given to the subject in professional journals, the frequency with which the phrase "land speculation" crops up in Parliament and the Press and the steady growth of the Henry George School of Social Science encourage us to think that the facts of economic life are beginning to win recognition over the confused theories of economists. There is encouragement, also, in the increasing demand in the United States for revision of the tax laws to shift the burden from personal property to land values.

But we must enter the New Year with a renewed sense of our responsibilities. We must take every opportunity to channel the mounting dissatisfaction with the political nostrums of the day away from still more government intervention and towards greater freedom, so as to sweep away the deeply rooted privileges of our age.

JANUARY, 1962

THE WAY AHEAD?

Extract from "A Mighty Maze" by
GORDON L. SIMPSON, F.I.M.T.A., F.C.C.S.

(*The Rating and Valuation Journal*, November, 1961)

THE government in France has considerable directive powers which are used to direct the activities of firms and organisations towards compliance with the national plan. Through the central bank the government controls credit and fund-raising facilities and has direct control of one-third of gross investment, including public works, nationalised industries and local authorities. It would appear that with such an effective half-nelson on almost the whole national economy, the government is able to compel the acceptance of whatever economic plan is determined with or without the aid of commissions. The commissions do, however, enable sections of the community who would be unwilling to ally themselves to any particular political function to put their expertise to the service of the nation without accepting the full thralldom of the civil service. . . .

It is pertinent to question whether objective advice could be expected from foreign-dominated industries whose concern for the British economy might or might not coincide with the best interest of Britain. In such a plan as the French have, one can see the seeds of a nightmare that could make Orwell's "1984" seem a pleasant dream. Big business is becoming more and more international (and perhaps non-national) in character and it is within the bounds of possibility that business and industrial empires may become more powerful than governments, which could become a mere front for the business interests. Far-fetched? Go back a few years to Clive, Warren Hastings and the East India Company. . . .

FLORENCE VERINDER

WE regret to report the death of Miss Florence Verinder who succumbed to a heart attack on January 3. Miss Verinder was a daughter of the late Frederick Verinder, Secretary for very many years of the English League for the Taxation of Land Values.

She was a devoted worker all her life for the cause of land value taxation and free trade and had been active recently as a representative in Eastbourne of the Rating Reform Campaign.

Many will remember her as a regular attender at International Conferences.

She is survived by four sisters and a brother to whom we tender our sincere sympathies.