

QUESTIONS IN THE HOUSE

THE DEVELOPMENT CHARGE

Time and again questions crop up about the anomalies and arbitrariness of the Development Charges under the Town and Country Planning Act. On March 13 Miss Irene Ward stated that in a recent case a development charge of £250 was announced which on negotiation was reduced to £100; and asked, if £250 was a wrong or unfair sum why was that original high development charge put forward in the first place? The Minister, Mr. Hugh Dalton, satisfied himself with a paltry quip: "I should have thought," he said, "that the person concerned would have been very glad rather than otherwise." Members cried: "Answer the question." We say the same.

THE LANDLORD COMPENSATION

A global sum of £300,000,000 (borne by the general taxpayer) is earmarked for sharing among landowners whose land had a speculative value at the passing of the Town and Country Planning Act. This is to take the form of National Debt bonds to be issued in 1953.

What progress has been made in assessing and settling the claims "for depreciation in land values" as provided for in the Act? In answer to that question Mr. Jay (for the Chancellor of the Exchequer) replied on March 7 that by the end of February 828,000 claims had been received in England and Wales and 138,000 in Scotland. About one-ninth had been finally agreed or otherwise determined. Claims so far determined are not a fair cross-section of claims received, and it would be misleading at this date to publish the amount.

FEATHER BEDDED AGRICULTURE

The direct subsidies paid to farmers during the year 1950-51 under the Agriculture Act are estimated at £22½ million. The Ministry of Food's subsidies on home-grown food in the same year are estimated at £260½ million, but it is not possible to determine to what extent this includes a subsidy to producers.—*T. Williams, Ministry of Agriculture, February 15.*

But this is only part of the Government aid by which the towns are mulcted to make holiday on the countryside. Among other grants there is the huge subsidy represented by the exemption of agricultural land (however valuable) from local taxation. Farmers fortunately within the ring that the Agricultural Acts have built round them may think themselves secure on their feather beds, which corrupt vote-bribing governments have padded and continue to pad for them. This racket can have only one end. The subsidies are eventually cashed in the higher prices of land which now, when farms are on offer in the market, are reaching a prohibitive level. Seeking a foothold within this bounty-fed area the would-be cultivator is either frustrated or bonded to the hilt from the outset; and so also the small holdings movement is washed out. It is this land monopoly that must be broken and all its scaffolding torn down if agriculture itself and the whole industrial life of the country is to be saved from irretrievable disaster. Land Value Taxation and Free Trade are the solvents and the salvation. Let none gainsay.

IF THE TAXED GEESSE COULD LAUGH

The Ministry of Food incurred a loss of £119,594 in the contract it made in May, 1949, for the importation of geese from Poland. This loss included about £25,000 for cold storage charges and the payment of £85,010 in customs tariff.—*Maurice Webb, Minister of Food, February 19.*

Here is State Trading and Protectionism in double harness, and what a crazy load they pull. Many imported foods (other than from British Commonwealth) are taxed at customs. The Ministry of Food as bulk buyer pays the tariff to the Exchequer and that money feeds the food subsidies payable by the Exchequer. There's full employment for the clerical staffs. Geese are accounted the stupidest of animals but they can certainly hand it to the Planning Economists. Now a question should be asked what is the total amount of custom duties the Food Ministry pays in a year on its import purchases.

COFFEE AS CURRENCY

The State as profiteer and money changer apparently pays twice as much for coffee as it would do if it limited itself to the grocery trade. When coffee is permitted (by whom?) to be used as "hard currency," British consumers are bled. The question (February 19) was: "Why, since no evidence of any substantial increase in the cost of production has been produced by the growers of colonial and other suppliers of coffee, the prices for 1950-51 and 1952 crops have been increased by an average of 100 per cent?" The Minister of Food replied: "These prices were increased in exchange for the right to re-sell the coffee to earn dollars." It just doesn't make sense.

BEWARE THE PURCHASE TAX

The net is very fine. Mr. Driberg on February 15 raised the matter of the tax imposition because a few words of greeting were added to the cards bearing lists of church services for Holy Week and Easter circulated by the clergy to their parishioners. Mr. Douglas Jay, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, saying he would like to see a sample of the cards, declared that they would "attract purchase tax" if they are of the description known as greeting cards under group 24 of the Purchase Tax Schedule.

The printing of "God be with you" or any greeting taxed at 33½ per cent., or is it 100 per cent.? Has it come to that? Or, if you avoid such courtesies (no more Xmas or birthday cards or the like) and escape the exaction, you are not doing your bit towards supporting the Welfare Services—unless you allow the Welfare State to pick your pocket in some other equally surreptitious way.

SILVER CUPS FOR FREE MILK

Here is another Purchase Tax case. Mr. Butcher on February 27 asked why cups presented to schools to encourage children in sports and swimming, are charged at 100 per cent. Purchase Tax, instead of the lower rate charged on other electro-plated articles.

Mr. Hugh Gaitskell, Chancellor of the Exchequer, replied: Because they fall into the category of articles similar in character to vases and as such are chargeable at the 100 per cent. rate.

Perhaps Mr. Gaitskell has in mind to earmark this cup-tax money to pay for the milk these children drink at school?

LET INFLATION FLOURISH

In a report on the cost of living, for the benefit of a London chamber of commerce, an official of the Central Office of Information has stated (*Evening Standard*, January 25) that "rising prices are a good thing because they provide an incentive to business" and that a man "will buy more to-day if he knows prices are going up to-morrow."

Mr. Douner raised this matter in the House of Commons on February 20 asking how the expenditure of public money on trash of this description could be justified, and how could the salary of a man who is capable of writing it be justified? Mr. Herbert Morrison replied it would have been fair on the part of the Member if he had supplied that information in advance in which case he would have looked into it.

MINISTERING TO MANCHESTER

It was stated in a question put by Mr. Boyd Carpenter on February 19 that 878 sheep in a consignment supplied to Manchester earlier in the month could not be sold until bad bits had been cut off and that 389 of the sheep were found to be covered with green and shiny mould; these were sent to sausage manufacturers. The facts as stated were not denied. Mr. Webb, Minister of Food, merely remarked that: "There was indeed a complaint. We get complaints every week—that is normal. It is not a matter that is confined to the public operation of meat supplies; it has gone on right throughout time. This particular question was settled amicably between the butchers' representatives and my Ministry's local officers."

It remained for Mr. Webb to say how much had to be wasted, and at what price the butchers got the remainder in this "amicable settlement."