

repudiating the present system which made land tax a tax upon capital and labour and effort, and discouraged the adding of improvements to land. When land was taxed on its value as raw land the holder found it unprofitable to keep it idle. "And so it has been argued with perfect truth that the new system of valuation tends to discourage withholding of land and encourage the putting of land to use." It had been 27 years since there had been a revaluation of land and during that time thousands of small people had acquired land on inflated value. They were paying taxes on those inflated values, while at the same time many more were sitting down on lands of a tax value which had no relation to modern trends.

"The outstanding agrarian fact of Jamaica since 1926 has been a vast increase in the number of small holdings. . . . The small farmers of Jamaica will welcome this measure with joy. I must say at long last they will not pay taxes on their houses; they will not pay taxes on their fruit trees." This was not the time to consider the recommendation of the Bloomberg Committee that there should be general relief from taxes on land below a given value, but when the time came the Government would consider carefully and sympathetically the proposal that all small property owners should be relieved of all land taxes entirely. It might be necessary, however, to charge even the smallest land owner a nominal tax to prove his occupation of the land.

Refuting Mr. Sangster's reflections about New Zealand, Mr. Manley referred to the Local Government Commission which in its report* published last June had stated that land value taxation was not only more expedient and equitable than taxation imposed on the annual value of land and buildings taken together, but gave rise to fewer anomalies. Nearly all the counties in New Zealand were in favour of changing to the system which was proposed in the present Bill.

It was not intended to use the valuation of land at *improved value* for anything other than special rates, for services like water, fire, and so on.

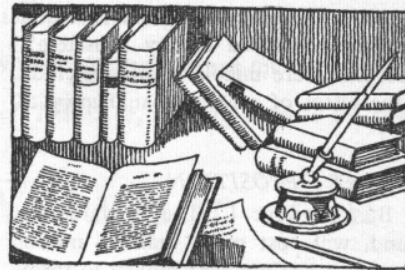
*See *L&L*, October, 1956. "Ethical, Expedient and Equitable."

OUR CARIBBEAN BOOKSHOP

Advertisements offering a free copy of this journal and literature on the land question were inserted in the *Jamaica Daily Gleaner* and the *Trinidad Guardian* last October on the recommendation of Mr. Ashley Mitchell, who visited the B.W.I. on business last summer.

Among the many who replied was a bookseller in Trinidad—MR. COLVIN W. PATRICK—who immediately bought for retail sale 48 copies of the new condensed edition of Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*. We have been pleased to appoint Mr. Patrick our sole agent in Trinidad, supplying him with a wide selection from our catalogue. Readers in B.W.I. are requested to make known Mr. Patrick's service—his address: P.O. Box 262, Port-of-Spain.

26



BOOK
REVIEW

Malthus Refuted

Must Men Starve?—the Malthusian Controversy.

By JACOB OSER.*

Jonathan Cape, London. 331 pages. 25s.

IF THERE IS one characteristic which distinguishes the mind of the adult from that of the modern child it is surely the placid acceptance of the paradox. Examples are legion. The destruction of food while millions starve; the "protection" of the people from the goods they wish to buy; the acceptance of penal rates of taxation to get something "free"; the cheerful payment of huge sums for "not raising pigs"—one succumbs to mental indigestion before the menu is hardly begun. Now, like a clean, fresh north-easter comes a book which will do much to blow away the smog of ignorance and prejudice which has allowed the grim theory of Malthus to exist side by side with such contradicting realities as North American food surpluses and the soil bank plan.

Professor Oser's approach to his task is methodical—almost clinical. The Malthus "Law of Population" is placed on the operating table:

"Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio; subsistence increases at best only in an arithmetical ratio."

With a few deft incisions, the vicious doctrine is exposed in all its stark malignity:

"All the children born beyond what would be required to keep up the population to this level must necessarily perish. . . . To act consistently . . . we should facilitate . . . the operations of nature in producing this mortality. Instead of recommending cleanliness to the poor we should encourage contrary habits. In our towns we should make the streets narrower, crowd more people into the houses, and court the return of the plague. In the country, we should build our villages near stagnant pools, and particularly encourage settlements in all marshy and unwholesome situations."

That there is hunger in the world, Professor Oser does not deny. About two-thirds of the world's population, he says, are not getting enough to eat. But what is the cause? Is it the inherent indolence of mankind? Is it the implacable severity of Nature? Is it Man's natural bent for war and destruction? Resolutely, categorically, the Professor turns his back on any verdict savouring of "natural causes." In a few, well-presented chapters he demonstrates that responsibility for the world's hunger lies

*Assistant Professor of Economics, State University of New York, Harpur College.

Land & Liberty

almost entirely with faulty human institutions: man-made tariffs and other barriers to natural trade; man-made restrictions on the freedom of some groups to the benefit (and profit) of others.

A grim picture is painted of conditions in the underdeveloped countries. There is the forcible removal of millions of Africans from their ancestral homes and their herding into the least desirable areas, so that mere handfuls of white settlers may occupy the most fertile land. The appalling poverty of the (landless) masses in the Middle East is contrasted vividly with the fantastic pomp and luxury of the ruling classes. The wretched peasant in India and China is seen helpless in the iron grip of the landowner and the moneylender. In Latin America the people farm the poorer soil of the hill and mountainside while the rich land of the valley is speculatively held out of use.

The profits made by some of the larger "international" companies are reviewed and supplemented by a graphic account of some of the ways in which, in the backward countries, the economic scales are weighted in favour of such concerns, to the detriment, and sometimes ruin, of the native population.

Finally, and for good measure, a staggering mass of facts and figures is presented to show how the inept and mercantilist policies of governments, influenced by the pressure of particular interests, keep up the prices of urgently needed food, and lead in the end to the destruction of food while millions of hungry mouths remain unfilled.

A fault of this analysis of the causes of poverty and hunger is that each factor is presented in isolation, with little attempt made to relate one with another. The author appears not to recognise that unjust systems of land tenure, as well as being evils in the agricultural sphere, are also the underlying source of the high profits of the colonising companies, and the cause of tariffs, quotas, etc.

This oversight in diagnosis is unfortunate for it leads the author, in offering a prescription, to ignore the lessons contained in his earlier chapters. It is as though Sir Alexander Fleming, having discovered the virus of his search, should prescribe, not penicillin, but a course of leeches and aspirin.

Land reform? Yes, this is proposed but no definite procedure is suggested, and the problem is regarded primarily as an agricultural one. Real land reform would lead to a drastic redistribution of wealth, yet the author contemplates the landowners remaining as wealthy as ever, and is content to suggest that they should devote their fortunes to industrialising their countries. Industrialisation, in fact, is regarded as an end in itself, to be achieved at all costs. At this point one almost wonders whether the writer can be the same person as he who made such a convincing diagnosis of the world's ills. One contrasts, for instance, the brilliant fantasy of New York being declared a separate country (replete with its own tariffs, customs, exchange control, etc., and proceeding rapidly to starvation level austerity) with such comments as:

February, 1957

"The first necessity is, therefore, the protection of infant industries in the industrially backward countries."
And

"What is needed is some kind of 'League of Underdeveloped States' which will fix the price of its exports."

Judged against the great promise of its earlier chapters, the latter part of this book is a disappointing anti-climax, for the author tosses aside the key to economic justice in his hand, and recommends instead that the wrong door be broken open with a club.

True land reform, which requires that the community should receive the land value which it creates and maintains, is not mentioned. Yet in a chapter on world food production, setting out the various grain-producing countries in order of yield per acre, top place is taken by Denmark, despite its "rather poor and sandy soil." Is it mere coincidence that in Denmark some part of the annual rent of land is collected by means of national and local taxes on land values, and that protectionist tariffs are less burdensome than in most other countries?

Here, then, is a book of immense interest, full of valuable facts, figures and argument, which effectively answers the Malthusian contention that the world must necessarily head for starvation. But in indicating the practical way ahead the signposts are blurred, indistinct and offcompass. After the earlier chapters the reader looks—but in vain—for the philosophy that, with full social justice, with land value owned by the community, and with no artificial barriers to trade, the producers of food would compete on equal terms with the producers of other forms of wealth. As demand for food rose so would its price. This in turn would bring more land, men and materials into food production, thus ensuring an increased supply, banishing hunger and starvation from our planet.

B.W.B.

Wide Open Spaces

Mr. R. W. Thompson, author of *Voice from the Wilderness* (a book well known to students of the Henry George School), in the course of a letter dealing with the problem of refugees from Hungary and elsewhere published in *The Economist*, January 12, wrote:

Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, in particular, absorbed more than 2 million refugees between the wars. They came in their shiploads, men, women and children, from all Central Europe, Poland, Jugoslavia, Czechslovakia, the Saar, Germany, all fleeing from terror or hopeless want. Many arrived without funds; yet in South America they found new lives for old. Tens of thousands found real happiness and prosperity, and enriched the lands to which they came.

First in the Chaco war, and later on a special journey in 1938, I visited scores of settlements, some established in the early 1920s and others in the course of establishment, mainly along the littoral of the Alto Parana in the Misiones territory of Argentina and in Paraguay. Everywhere the settlers were thriving, their homes reflecting their national architecture, and the place names of Central