

THE UNREST IN THE WEST INDIES

DURING RECENT months riots in Jamaica, Barbados, and other parts of the British West Indies have turned attention to the social and economic conditions in these islands.

Most of the inhabitants are of African origin being the descendants of the slaves brought to work the plantations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In Jamaica, for instance, out of a total population of more than a million, only some 15,000 are white, the remainder include not only Negroes but East Indians and other races.

On the cessation of slavery in 1838 the white population continued to be the dominant class by reason of their ownership of the land and their control of the legislature. In all these colonies the legislature consists partly of elected and partly of nominated members. In every case the nominated members are in a majority. In addition, in order to be put on the register of electors a citizen must show that he possesses a certain income, and although this qualification appears low by English standards (ranging from £30 a year in the Windward and Leeward islands to £60 in Trinidad) it far exceeds the wage of the ordinary agricultural labourer. Thus in Jamaica, for instance, there are only 66,000 registered voters. Moreover, in order to be elected as a member of the legislature a man must possess an income of not less than £200 a year.

The wages of male agricultural labourers range from 1s. a day in the Windward and Leeward Islands to 2s. a day in Jamaica. The Commission on the Barbados Disturbances in 1937 said: "It is little wonder that one of the most fertile causes of discontent is the low standard of wages which prevails in many occupations. . . . The evidence given by several plantation proprietors proves conclusively that the average day's pay of even the best agricultural labourers does not exceed 30 cents per day (1s. 3d.)."

Miserable housing conditions and malnutrition are the inevitable results of this general poverty. The Governor of Trinidad refers to the visit of a Dutch doctor from the Dutch East Indies in 1935. "He informed me that though he had twenty years' experience in the Dutch East Indies and although he had first hand knowledge of conditions resulting from vitamin deficiencies he had never seen such distressing conditions

as existed here among the East Indian labouring population where apparently men and women suffered from an absence of all the known vitamins." He also refers to the observations of one of the local Medical Officers who "stated that every adult above the age of 20 was affected, and that the working life of the population was reduced by at least 50 per cent. . . . A condition of lethargy pervaded the whole community which was only broken on festive occasions or in times of disorder."

Confirmation is contained in a series of articles by Mr Harold Stannard in *The Times* (25th, 26th and 27th May). "For most of the inhabitants of the West Indies life means work for a white boss at the subsistence level, and has never meant anything else since the first Africans were brought over some 400 years ago." He refers to "an enlightened employer who told me that his men worked badly because they had nothing to work for, and that the situation would become more difficult but much more hopeful if only they cherished some sort of ambition. But what ambition can be cherished by men whose income is 1s. a day?"

"Nutrition depends primarily upon wages. . . . Every Chinese-kept store exhibits, from floor to ceiling, shelf after shelf of tinned goods. These superbly productive islands, living mostly by the export of food, cannot feed themselves. It is estimated that Trinidad imports four-fifths of what it eats."

The Barbados report says: "In the old days plantation proprietors planted a fairly large acreage in food crops, some of which were sold to the labourers at preferential rates. But in recent years the cultivation of food crops has been so curtailed that the price of locally grown vegetables is often so high as to be beyond the modest means of the labourer." Not only are the people deprived of the opportunity of growing food for themselves by the land monopoly; the cost of living is raised by tariff taxation. In Jamaica in 1936 the total revenue was £2,176,000 of which £1,090,000 was derived from import duties and £90,000 from income tax.

Statistical information as to the ownership of land is extremely deficient. The following table shows the size of holdings cultivated in Trinidad and St Vincent:

TRINIDAD : POPULATION 448,000					ST VINCENT : POPULATION 56,500			
Size of Holding in acres	No. of Holdings	Average size acres	Area	%	No. of Holdings	Average size acres	Total Area	%
Under 10	10,038	6	62,744	16	4,591	2	11,382	21
11- 50	5,009	20	99,229	26	218	23	4,924	9
51- 100	456	71	32,162	9	23	79	1,826	3
101-1,000	574	281	161,496	43	78	385	30,021	56
Over 1,000	11	2,131	23,437	6	4	1,427	5,709	11
	16,088		379,068	100	4,914		53,862	100

(This table accounts for only a fraction of the total area of the country which for Trinidad is 1,192,960 acres and for St Vincent 96,000 acres.)

It is to be observed that the number of holdings is small in relation to the total population. It must also be remembered that many holdings may be owned by one person, the holder being merely a tenant. That this is so is confirmed by the census statistics which classify those engaged in agriculture, thus:—

	Trinidad	St Vincent
Independent Cultivators ..	8,762	389
Labourers	38,822	8,146

That the land monopoly is the root of the trouble has been virtually admitted. In 1897 a Royal Commission said: "No reform affords so good a prospect

1897
33
1930

for the permanent welfare in the future of the West Indies as the settlement of the labouring population on the land as small peasant proprietors, and in many places this is the only means by which the population can in future be supported." It was also observed that "the settlement of the labourers on the land has not, as a rule, been viewed with favour in the past by persons interested in the sugar estates. What suited them best was a large supply of labourers entirely dependent upon being able to find work on estates and consequently subject to their control and willing to work for low rates of wages." The Sugar Commission, after quoting this observation of their predecessors thirty-three years previously say: "It is manifest that where the economy of a community depends practically entirely, as that of Barbados, St Kitts and Antigua still does, upon a single industry carried on by the employment of wage labourers on estates, the public policy of the class most influential in guiding the government must almost inevitably incline to this economic view. If they encouraged action which, in their belief, must tend to diminish their labour supply, they would be cutting away the branch upon which they sit."

The facts could hardly be more brutally presented.

The major responsibility for this state of affairs rests upon the Colonial Office and the British Government, which, by its nominated members, is in control of the legislatures. It must be well aware of the facts, and also of the remedy. The abolition of customs duties and their replacement by a tax on the value of land, used or unused, would soon transform the situation.

DENMARK

A Great National Agricultural Exhibition, opened by the King of Denmark on the 18th June, and held for 10 days at Bellahøj, near Copenhagen, celebrated the 150th anniversary of the liberation of the Danish peasant from villeinage. One of the most interesting exhibits is the history of the peasant from 1788 to 1938, as told in the model villages through which the visitors pass. The village of 1788 is faithfully reproduced with its strip fields and the church bell ringing; the same village in smallholdings (after the break-up of the strip system) with its own fields and thatched roofs; still later the modern smallholdings with their red tiles. During the days of the Exhibition a monster demonstration was held around the Liberty Column erected in Copenhagen, 1792-97, to commemorate the liberation, and to speak the inspiring word of freedom. It was here, also, that a great demonstration was held at the time of the International Conference for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade in 1926. It was an unforgettable experience for those present as they listened to the speeches including the eloquent oration on "The Call and Message of Liberty," by Mr Ove Rode, former Minister for Home Affairs . . . "From social freedom arose in Denmark political freedom; and out of that will grow one day for society the economic liberty under which free and independent citizens will enjoy the full fruits of their labour, while the community will receive what it creates."

The issue of *Land & Liberty* for September, 1936, a volume of 40 pages reporting the International Conference, contains a wealth of information about the Danish scene and history. Copies were preserved for after use and may be had, price 6d. each, on application. The preceding issues and succeeding issues, those for August and October, price 3d. each, have also much instructive matter. These issues are invaluable to the student of the land question in Denmark.

HON H. F. HARDACRE

BY THE death on 5th March at Brisbane of the Hon H. F. Hardacre the land reform movement in Australia has lost an able and outstanding advocate.

When Henry George visited Australia in 1890, Mr Hardacre accompanied him on his Queensland tour. Becoming associated with the Queensland Labour Party he was elected as a member of the Legislative Assembly. In due course he became Minister for Lands and Agriculture and later was Minister for Education. Eventually he retired from Parliament and was appointed as a member of the Land Court, retiring in 1931.

Mr Hardacre was one of the most notable Henry George men that Australia has produced. Like others who have taken up this cause he had few educational advantages in his youth. But he had grit and determination combined with good natural abilities.

He was exceedingly well versed not only in the writings of Henry George, but also in those of previous economists as well as those of our own time.

Results came quickly in Queensland. A Local Government Bill was before Parliament in 1890. Mr W. Stephens, M.L.A., spoke up for rating on land values only. Although a young man he had been Mayor of South Brisbane. He made out such a good case that he impressed Sir Samuel Griffith, Premier, and Sir Thos. McIlwraith, Treasurer. So rating on land values became law in Queensland.

When the Labour Party came into power in 1915 Mr Hardacre became a member of the Government. He found that the Treasurer of the day, Mr Theodore, did not propose to tax land values. So Mr Hardacre felt that it was time for him to speak up. He did so to such purpose that the taxation policy of the Government was altered and taxes were imposed on land values.

Since his retirement Mr Hardacre has done much good work as President of the Queensland Henry George League. He was accorded a State funeral which, after a religious service in St John's Cathedral, wended its way through the city to the Bulimba Cemetery, where he lies not far from the grave occupied by his old comrade in politics and fellow Georgian, Vernon Winstanley.

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