

## URBAN COUNCILS AND THE LAND QUESTION

existing therein. . . . This value represents and measures the advantages and opportunities produced by the community, and men, when not permitted to acquire the absolute dominion over such lands, will willingly pay the value of this unearned increment in the form of rents, just as men, when not permitted to own men, will willingly pay wages for desired services. . . .

"The fund thus created is clearly by the law of justice a public fund, not merely because the value is a growth that comes to the natural bounties which God gave to the community in the beginning but also, and much more, because it is a value produced by the community itself, so that this rental value belongs to the community by that best of titles, namely, producing, making or creating. To permit any portion of this public property to go into private pockets, without a perfect equivalent being paid into the public treasury, would be an injustice to the community. Therefore the whole rental fund should be appropriated to common or public uses."

The way to achieve this, as Dr McGlynn goes on to explain, is by means of a tax on "the annual value of the land itself, irrespective of the use made of it or the improvements on it."

It will be seen with what scrupulous care Dr McGlynn distinguished between the land itself and the buildings and other things made by man. This distinction Mr Zwierlein obscures by talking of real estate, which he says is overburdened with taxation. Houses and other buildings are certainly overburdened by taxation, but the land value is not. On the contrary in the State of New York alone there are tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of lots of subdivided land which are unused and held in the hope of some future increase in value. To exempt real estate from all taxation, as Mr Zwierlein suggests, will simply encourage this stupid and anti-social practice. Whereas to tax the land value and exempt buildings will encourage home-ownership, make land available for use at a reasonable price, and help trade and production. It would certainly be strange to think that this sensible policy was "in conflict with Catholic Doctrine." Happily it is not, nor has the Church ever felt it necessary to issue any condemnation of the legislation which in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Denmark, and elsewhere has established the beginnings, or rather a substantial instalment, of the proposal advocated by Henry George and Dr McGlynn.

3d. THE TRUE NATIONAL DIVIDEND. Pros and Cons of Social Credit. By W. R. Lester, M.A.

3d. THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL AND SITE VALUE RATING. Debates on the Bill and discussion in the Press.

3d. A GREAT INIQUITY. By Leo Tolstoy.

4d. KARL MARX'S THEORIES OF SURPLUS VALUE AND LAND RENT. By F. C. R. Douglas, M.A., L.C.C., M.P.

1s. MY NEIGHBOUR'S LANDMARK. Short studies in Bible land laws. By Fredk. Verinder New (fourth) Edition.

1s. WHAT'S WRONG WITH TAXATION? By Judge Jackson H. Ralston.

THE AIREBOROUGH (Yorks) Urban District Council at its May, 1942, meeting carried unanimously a resolution declaring that:

"This Council, having in mind the rather secret investigations and the arrangements for local government reconstruction now proceeding under Government auspices, feel that the best interests of urban district councils, and their local communities, would be more effectually safeguarded and advanced if a separate and distinct Urban District Councils Association were created for the West Riding of Yorkshire, and invites all such Councils seriously to consider the question at an early date; and that copies of this resolution be sent to all urban district councils in the West Riding."

At the call of the Aireborough Council, a representative Conference of Urban District Councils in the West Riding was held in the Civil Court, Town Hall, Leeds, on 3rd June and a resolution was unanimously adopted to form the new association. The case was put by Councillor Joe Walker of Aireborough who after explaining the administrative arguments in its favour and the assistance the Councils could give each other through a separate and distinct Association (just as there are U.D.C. associations in Middlesex, Leicestershire, Lancashire, Cheshire and in the North Riding of Yorkshire), gave a number of additional reasons of a comparable and economic nature:—

"Because rural, parish, and county local government is largely manned by the agricultural and landed interests which has a distinct bias in favour of a continuation of a complete de-rating of land and farm premises.

"Not only are they given rate exemption to the tune of £10,800,000 annually in England and Wales, but Government subsidies for 1939 for various forms of agricultural production amounted to £22,984,935, so that we have here a free gift to the Vested Interests of Land an annual sum of £33,784,735.

"Since 1939, because of a complete cessation almost of agricultural imports in War Time, and the consequent development and general expansion of our home production, new subsidies and grants have been conceded until land values in rural areas and urban and town areas have greatly increased, while so much competition for blitzed sites in cities has taken place that even the Government had to take action against it, but the consequence of this general activity to enhance values, is that, it is estimated, they have risen between 25 and 30 per cent.

"We all are, or should be, interested in Housing and Town Planning, but are we all aware of the fact that the first Town Planning Act was passed in 1909, and comparatively little has been done to implement this and subsequent Acts, for the simple reason that dear land and dear money has held us up all along the line.

"Mr Neville Chamberlain on the 6th October, 1935, when Chancellor of the Exchequer, spoke at a dinner at the Birmingham Town Planning Institute, and mentioned that although provisional steps had been taken for town planning

schemes covering 12 million acres, only 150,000 acres were subject to final and completed schemes. He added: 'It is inevitable, in view of the complication and multiplicity of the interests concerned, that there should be considerable lag between resolutions of provisional control and the coming into operation of the scheme. I shall not live to see it, and before it comes about, irreparable damage will have been done, millions of pounds will have been wasted, and probably many thousands of lives will have been lost for want of orderly and careful planning.'

"The source of all the trouble is land-lordism, or, as Mr Chamberlain so delicately put it, 'the complication and multiplicity of the interests concerned.' How much more easy it would have been to deal with them if Mr Chamberlain had not been so precipitately anxious to destroy his predecessors' valuation and land value tax.

"In February, 1906, a deputation from 118 local authorities presented to the Government a petition signed by 518 local authorities, urging legislation for the separate assessment and rating of land values. In 1931 the Finance Act was passed with a provision for a land value tax and a land valuation which, with certain necessary amendments that could easily be made (ruling out such exemptions as the Act contained) laid the foundation for the long-demanded and long-delayed reform in local rating. But obstruction again succeeded. The National Government elected on the grounds of financial economy in the autumn of that year, although pledged not to do any partisan thing, at once suspended the land value tax and the valuation provisions, and repealed them in 1934.

"All this apparent reiteration of the great importance of Land rating and taxing is vital, because it brings our minds back to the real cleavage of interest between the rural and county local governing bodies and the urban authorities and emphasises strongly the urgent need to form a separate and distinct Urban District Councils Association.

"We Aireborough Councillors would say we want the proposed new Urban District Councils Association for the West Riding of Yorkshire to be second to none in practical level-headed efficiency, but withal to be inspired with a desire for equity and justice. We are not opposed to a reasonable democratically-chosen regionalism wherever it is obviously for the public good and which safeguards the legitimate interests of the constituent bodies, their servants, and the community generally; but we are opposed to having imposed upon us from above, without consultation, a totalitarian despotism which may be calculated to give us mere amalgamated machinery without soul and the humanities of life."

*The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, May issue, contains Miss V. G. Peterson's very favourable review of the book *Why the German Republic Fell*, published by the Hogarth Press, London, and on sale at the reduced price of 1s. net.