

£350 per Acre in West Hartlepool.—The NORTHERN ECHO reports that a meeting of the West Hartlepool Council on 3rd February the Ministry of Health had sanctioned settlement of Messrs. E. & W. Richardson's claim in respect of the Ruby Road Estate at £8,500. Councillor Turnbull stated the price represented about £350 per acre, to which Councillor Fryer replied that it was a monstrous price to pay for agricultural land. Councillor Candler gave point to the remark by asking if the owners of this land were paying rates on the basis of £350 an acre.

We should say—No. It is not at all likely. "Agricultural" land does not contribute on the basis of its market value, but on the rent obtainable for it in its existing condition. The White Paper 119 of 1913 informs us that there are 880 such "agricultural" acres in West Hartlepool, out of a total area of 2,958 acres. The total rates paid in 1911-12 amounted to £89,122, to which the "agricultural" land contributed £254—an average of only 5s. 9d. per acre. It is therefore monstrous that £350 per acre should be paid for a housing site, while owners of a vast territory of 880 acres within the town boundaries are thus exempted from their due payment to the upkeep of the municipal services.

£800 per Acre in Chadderton.—The MIDDLETON GUARDIAN, of February 14th, reports that at a meeting of the Chadderton District Council on 9th February local housing schemes were discussed. In the neighbourhood of Burnley Lane they have already secured some 15 to 20 acres at a great price of £150 an acre. The Council then sought to secure a site of some 15 acres on the other side of the road. This land is owned by Major C. R. E. Radcliffe, and that gentleman asked the Council the sum of £800 an acre for his land. The view of the Council is that they are not prepared to pay more than £150 an acre, and with very little discussion it was decided on Monday to proceed under the Housing of the Working Classes Act to demand the compulsory acquisition of this plot of land at a rate to be fixed by arbitration.

As showing the contrast between rateable values and both landowners' prices and selling values, it is recorded in the House of Commons White Paper 119 of 1913, that out of 3,082 acres in Chadderton, 1,650 acres are held as "agricultural" land. In 1911-12 the total rates paid amounted to £47,068, of which the "agricultural" land contributed £323—an average of only 3s. 11d. per acre. Thus there is plenty of "cheap" land in Chadderton judging by the rateable value of all these acres of agricultural land. But when it is wanted for housing, the Council pays £150 per acre. It makes a further demand and the landowner fixes his price at £800 per acre. We commend the Cardiff Rating Resolution to the Chadderton district councillors.

£227 per Acre in Stockton.—The Stockton Corporation met on February 3rd (NORTHERN ECHO report) and agreed to the recommendation of the Housing Committee to purchase the Blue Hall Farm at a total cost of £18,500, which with redemption of tithe, land tax, etc., would run out to about 10½d. per yard. This is equivalent to £227 per acre. Councillor Robson estimated that the loss on the housing scheme would be £44,000 a year for seven years and thereafter £30,000 a year.

The price paid is out of all relation to the rateable value of available land in Stockton. By that test, landowners are either charging excessive prices or are enjoying extraordinary privileges as taxpayers. The White Paper 119 of 1913 shows that out of a total area of 3,031 acres, there are 1,789 acres of "agricultural" land. In 1911-12 the total rates paid were £64,607, to which the "agricultural" land contributed only £268—an average of only 3s. per acre. Yet the Council buys sites at the rate of £227 per acre.

WHY IS THERE A HOUSING PROBLEM?

There are 20,000 acres of vacant building land in Birmingham—sites for 160,000 new houses.

There are ample supplies of the materials necessary for building—nature's stores of clay, stone, lime, slate, etc., are far from being exhausted.

There are plenty of architects, builders and skilled workers who desire full employment.

Then why are houses not being built?

Because, although there are 160,000 vacant sites, these cannot be obtained by builders on terms which allow a fair return for their outlay. Under the present rating system the owner can withhold his land until he gets an inflated price, and yet only pay 7s. an acre in rates, because the land is rated at its "agricultural" and not at its building value. If these 20,000 acres were rated as building land—which it is—there would be competition among the owners to secure users, and builders would have the choice of thousands of sites at prices which would encourage them to build.

Because, while nature amply supplies clay, stone, lime, etc., these also are under the control of landowners, who pay no adequate taxation for their privileged monopoly. The tendency of this monopoly is to enhance cost and to restrict building outlay. The owners of land containing building material must be taxed on the true market value (including all mineral rights) of the land they hold. They will then allow access to nature's stores on such terms as will give builders an ample supply of bricks, etc., at reasonable prices.

Not only will the rating of land values help the builder, but it will bring relief to the tenant by reducing his rates. Many towns in our Colonies have abolished all rates on houses and substituted rating solely on land values.

Birmingham rates on houses are 12s. in the £, and add 7s. 6d. to the weekly rent of 15s., making the total cost to the tenant 22s. 6d. The landowner escapes with rates of only 7s. an acre, while the tenants pay £70 in rates when the same land is put to its proper use for housing. Even a partial application of land value rating which lowered the rates from 12s. to 6s. would greatly relieve tenants.

The rating and taxation of land values will cause building land to be put to its proper use; secure an abundant supply of building material; give prosperity to the building trade; make Government subsidies unnecessary; lighten the burden of rates on houses.

To solve the housing problem—demand the rating and taxation of land values, the only practical way to obtain houses for all.—(Issued as a leaflet by the Midland Land Values League: Chapman Wright, Secretary, 20, Cannon Street, Birmingham.)

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