

LAND & LIBERTY

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THE DEPRESSED AREAS

Cumberland is, after all, mainly an agricultural county, and many of its industrial workers, notably coalminers and iron-ore miners, have maintained a contact with the land not found among workers in the more highly industrialized areas. The difficulties involved in any land settlement policy are fully appreciated, but, . . . given the right conditions, there is a real prospect of success in West Cumberland.—*Mr J. C. C. Davidson's Report on West Cumberland and Haltwhistle.*

Unless the land can be made to support a larger population, many of those who would normally have been attached to the coal-mining industry will be condemned to a permanent state of pauperization.—*Capt. Euan Wallace's Report on Durham and Tyneside.*

In every district there is a great desire for men to have small holdings. . . . There are numbers of men out of work as miners who were originally agricultural labourers and would soon pick up work on the land again. . . . In Glamorganshire they have had some trouble in obtaining the land for small holdings, and in some cases have probably had to pay a great deal too much.—*Sir Wyndham Portal's Report on South Wales and Monmouthshire.*

There has existed in Scotland for many generations a demand for settlement on the land in various ways, and this demand has never been satisfied.—*Sir Arthur Rose's Report on Scotland.*

A body of men I saw at Kielder (Training Centre), engaged on breaking stones, sang cheerfully at their work and appeared to be happy.—*Mr J. C. C. Davidson.*

I visited one of the Unemployed Clubs in the Rhondda Valley with which I was enormously impressed, the men contributing twopence a week making furniture and selling it to one another.—*Sir Wyndham Portal.*

The investigators appointed by the Government to report upon unemployment in certain areas of the country have provided facts enough but little in the way of recommendations. The desperate conditions they describe are not confined to these areas but are true of every industrial district. There is hardly a county or town that has not its distressed area where the problem of unemployment is not as acute as in any of the districts that have been selected for the Government's special attention.

The recognition that alternative employment is available on the land and that miners, at any rate, need no intensive training before they turn to agriculture, does not carry the reporters very far. They have only petty culture, market gardens and allotments in mind, and Capt. Euan Wallace utters the warning that these schemes must be developed with caution, "since any policy that induced intensive competition in existing markets would be open to serious objection." In the strange economic world the Government is building up, of course the man is Public Enemy No. 1 who increases supplies profitably to himself and at reduced prices. So it is not for the unemployed to endanger Mr. Walter Elliot's schemes of quotas and restrictions for the protection of the producer against the consumer. But

the tariff mentality runs through these documents. Sir Wyndham Portal suggests a subsidized beet sugar factory at Pembroke Dock as one of his employment schemes. Sir Arthur Rose, who speaks of the unsatisfied demand for land in Scotland, restricts his vision of land settlement to plots of $\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 acres, such as have "met with a considerable measure of success," due partly to "the measure of protection given to the commodities most usefully raised on these holdings." The fact is, from his own figures, that no more than 764 men have secured such holdings, and the claim that any success they have achieved is due to a tariff is tantamount to saying that they enjoy the privilege of plundering their neighbours through higher prices for their produce.

What is said about the burden of mining royalties and heavy local rates is quoted elsewhere. The rating system is admittedly an obstruction to development, but the only suggestions made for amending it are readjustments of the burden among the districts and subventions to local authorities out of the National Exchequer. Such a policy of rate reduction would only result in enhancing rents. The system has brought disaster in its train, not because of the amount of rates, but because of their incidence. It is the scourge of industry and the bulwark of land monopoly.

A number of minor public work schemes are suggested for giving employment in these depressed areas, and, exhausting the possibilities of such schemes, the conclusion is that whatever may be done, and supposing industry revived again, there will remain a large section of the inhabitants for whom there is no hope of employment. Of the Scottish districts, with a total population of 800,000 and with 160,000 men unemployed, it is declared that the "permanently surplus labour" is at least 60,000 men. In West Cumberland "an intensive campaign of publicity is wanted in order that work for all will not be forthcoming may be brought home to the unemployed men in the area." As to Durham, the "inevitable conclusion" is that a considerable though indeterminate surplus of workers will exist for some time to come. In South Wales and Monmouthshire, where 81,000 men are now unemployed, the position is that "even if existing industries were working to full capacity there would still be a surplus of 39,000 men unable to get any work."

It is not necessary to argue with such a monstrous contention that these districts are over-populated and that there is not room and livelihood for everyone given the opening up of natural resources now withheld at a landlord's price.

Capt. Euan Wallace comes near the heart of the subject in saying, while he describes a depressed area, that "the tendency for large masses of the population to become segregated into cities of the poor and of the rich is a definite feature of the Tyneside." In that statement he was leading up to proposals for the equalizing of local rates, but he conceded more than he realized. The segregation into cities of the poor and the rich is a definite feature of all the depressed areas. It is a definite feature of this civilization of ours that has somehow got so distorted that the benefits of material progress are most unequally shared, while any injury to society as a whole still leaves apparent plenty in the hands of the few. The question is not to find the reason for poverty; that would be easy if all were equally hit and all were reduced to the same circumstances. The question is why there is poverty in the midst of abundance, and there can be no explanation of the poverty of the poor that does not at the same time explain the richness of the rich. The fashionable view among those who will not or dare not look into deeper causes is that world forces and factors beyond the control of the home

Government are responsible for the poverty and unemployment in our midst. The failure of this assumption to explain how wealth flaunts itself in bad times as in good times proves how false it is.

Unemployment comes when wages are driven down to subsistence level or below it, or to the point approximating to what can be obtained from unemployment insurance or public assistance. In other countries not possessing these institutions the bottom level of wages is the living obtainable by begging or stealing. It is not that there is not enough work to do. There is plenty of work for all if they are willing to work for nothing.

The solution, then, is to raise wages so that one man can buy what another produces. What are these depressed areas but districts in which production has come to a stop, where the power to consume has therefore been crushed, which reacts again over the rest of the country and causes stagnation in every industry, whether heavy or light, whether for the provision of foodstuffs, clothing and shelter, or any of the commodities for which there is an enormously unsatisfied demand?

The reason why wages are low is that land is high in price. The unemployed man is everywhere on the margin. He looks out upon the natural resources that might be used but are monopolized for the exaction of rent. In fine, it is landlordism that has led to the disparity in the distribution of wealth and the unemployment that is but one of the effects of that.

The Reports have been presented to Parliament. A debate has taken place. All that the Government proposes in a Bill now before Parliament is to appoint a couple of Commissioners with four representatives and their staff "to initiate and prosecute schemes which lie outside the scope of ordinary public administration." They will have the spending of £2,000,000 to acquire land to form amenity trusts for clearing up derelict factory sites and slag heaps, to develop some agricultural holdings and occupational centres and arrange labour transference. Paltry and contemptible proposals the net result of which will be to provide temporary jobs for a few workers and present some landowners with a tidy gift of public money in this land acquisition and the increased values brought about by the improvement of derelict sites.

This is the best that the Government of vested interests can do. The unemployed man knocks in vain at the door of opportunity. Surely the reckoning will come.

A. W. M.

Professor J. B. S. Haldane, whose broadcast address was cancelled by the B.B.C., speaking at Leeds on 14th November, said that the means he would take for keeping us out of war for ever would be an Act of Parliament embodying the three following clauses: (1) All men from 18 to 45 years of age are deemed to have joined the army; (2) all property which is certified as required for war is deemed to have been bought by the Government; (3) the compensation paid to the owners of such property will not exceed the pension paid to a fully disabled soldier. "You have only to abolish the possibility of making money out of war," he said, "and to make it clear that the well-to-do people are going to do extremely badly out of it to stop war for all practical purposes."

The B.B.C. expected him to speak on the biological causes of war, but he took the view that there were no such causes. This is the view that the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade took in its well-known memorandum on "The Interdependence of the Causes of War and of Industrial Depression."

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