

Mr. Dacre mentions as a large landowner, the London County Council with its 8,640 acres as another "sign of the times" that the "era of the ducal landlords is fading." But that introduces quite a different aspect of the matter and leads to other considerations. The L.C.C. had to pay such prices to the dukes and others who "faded away" that it threw a heavy charge of debt on London ratepayers; and among the "signs of the times" has all along been the scandal of public land purchase—buying from landowners the values in land which they have done nothing to create. Mr. Dacre's facts and figures about the dukes and all else have a real bearing on the whole question of our land tenure and taxation system. Under it the burden is thrown on the *land user*, the builder, the improver, the householder, the shopkeeper, every one who has to work for a living, whereas it endows and protects those who, as mere monopolists, gather the values attaching to land, be they "big men" or "small men" who thus deprive the community of its property. We accept Mr. Dacre's information as a pointer to where the remedy

lies, excusing him from being engaged in any such purpose. The remedy is by way of the taxation and rating of land values. And significant, although this may be a digression, it was the London County Council itself with the Labour Party then in power in the Council, which took steps on that road when in 1938 it introduced in a hostile Parliament its Site Value Rating Bill. Earlier, in 1931, a Labour Government passed the Snowden Finance Act for a land valuation and a national tax on land values, an Act which the Conservatives repealed. Whatever the Labour Party has done or has not done since 1945, there stands to its discredit and disgrace that it did not re-enact the Snowden Act or revive the London Bill. Not only has the Labour Party failed in that respect; it has been responsible for legislation that has gone in precisely the opposite direction, strangling development with its Town and Country Planning Act and aggravating the injustices of the rating system, by the Local Government Act of 1948.

A. W. M.

## HOW COMMUNISTS TAKE ADVANTAGE—AN ITALIAN INCIDENT

The story behind the riots at Comacchio, N.E. Italy, on January 18, is told in the *Manchester Guardian*, January 27. There is widespread unemployment among the peasants who live in the swampy delta of the Po River where the main industry of fishing for eels is able to support only part of the population. So the fishermen decided they would have to turn to the land. Lacking money, instruments, tractors and farming knowledge they appealed to the Government to drain the land and establish small holdings. A bill to provide for land drainage, road mending and house building in the whole of the delta area, which provided for 400 million lire to be spent on Comacchio alone, was passed through Parliament. The money granted had been held up by a huge over-staffed and hopelessly inefficient bureaucracy. The Minister in charge of the matter came specially from Rome to explain what was proposed. The money was on its way. A very little more patience was necessary and the land drainage would begin. The Government was not idle. It had a frightful legacy from the war and a hundred Comacchios on its hands. It was determined to see Italy back to prosperity and to see justice done on the land. The Minister was well liked. There was no clapping but no hostility either. "But where were all the well educated, wealthy villa owners and their sons who inhabit the rich lands between Bologna and Ferrara? Why was the province absent from its poorest town? Somehow Italian provincial life is in the hands of the least skilled and the middle and upper classes take no part in it. As for the ancient aristocratic families, their heads are buried in the sand like ostriches, for the most part, and have been for centuries." The meeting had been held in December and, no action taken, the Communists on January 18 organised a procession to the town hall to ask for shifts of the unemployed to be engaged on the work, and the land allotted. Three thousand took part. They tried to get into the town hall. The police told the marchers to go home, someone threw a stone, a fight ensued, the police opened fire and a man was killed. The money for the land reclamation scheme has since arrived. As the Rome correspondent of the *M.G.* further remarks: "Now the Communists will say in Comacchio 'The money would never have

arrived but for us' and who will believe the Minister who spoke so quietly and convincingly that December Sunday in Comacchio?"

Whether these claims on the part of the Communists were justified is not in point nor are we concerned with the actual nature of the reforms contemplated. The incident is recited because it illustrates what is happening in most parts of the world to-day where the landlessness and the poverty of the people go together as cause and effect. The Communists turn these conditions to their political advantage and make their specious promises to the people who in their distress are prepared to listen to anything, only to find themselves in a state of slavery even worse than before. As we watch the great upheaval in so many countries we see the real allies of the Communists in the defenders of things as they are, the vested interests in privilege and monopoly who will not or cannot recognise the equal rights of all to the use of land, and who in their apathy, their hostility and intransigence make the State the engine for their power to hold the people in bondage. As a correspondent has written us, we shall never combat Communism by force, which appears to be the only thing the Western Powers can think of; and in that, the Western Powers are largely responsible for the present state of world affairs. In every single case where backward peoples have tried to improve their conditions, they have backed the privileged classes against the workers, just because in their estimation the private appropriation of the rent of land dare not be challenged. They will not allow the uprooting of that institution; and condemned both to futility and disaster are all the schemes they are evolving for the sending of aids and subventions on the lines of the Colonial Development Fund of our Government and the notorious "Point Four" policy of President Truman. These Governments would heavily tax their own citizens to send supplies abroad which in the circumstances of the *receiving countries*, where proprietorship of land is a private privilege, result in the one finality—an increase in the rent and price of land and the perpetuation if not the aggravation of the poverty of the people whom it was sought to benefit.

A. W. M.