

Letters to the Editor

VIEWS ON RATING

SIR, — I am sorry that your contributor, Paul Knight, feels that this Association is "not too enthusiastic about site-value rating as an alternative to the present system."

Our own recent memorandum stated the simple fact that the research we have so far managed does not provide sufficient information on which we can reach a final conclusion, but we certainly feel encouraged to undertake a more extensive exercise and the only bar is a financial one.

We certainly do believe that efforts should be made to eliminate residual doubts about the practicability of the system through further research and we have always regretted that far too many people condemn site-value rating on the most inadequate of grounds. As a professional body we thought it right to clear the air so that future discussion of this alternative could be on a fair and realistic basis.

May I assure Mr. Knight that given the financial support we shall not want any other encouragement to involve ourselves in a much larger and more informative research project.

Yours faithfully,

FRANK OTHICK.

Secretary, Rating and
Valuation Association.

London, S.W.1.

HUMAN ECOLOGY

SIR, — Seeing that my review, as it appeared in the October issue of your journal, seems to have lost in printing the part which dealt with Stapledon's positive ideas (as contrasted with his warnings of danger), I should be grateful if you would permit me to present them here instead. I feel that they will be of particular interest to readers of this journal, for like all deep thinkers Stapledon's faith was based ultimately on a true discernment of the *laws of nature*. Like others, he finds that these, at their deepest level, work constructively, not destructively.

Thus, reviewing our dilemma: how we have driven ourselves so far along the pathway of separation, with its suffering caused to us in every sphere of our lives, that we are unable, even if we would, at this stage altogether to reverse our trend — Stapledon hears the voice of the "common-

sense" man airing his "practical wisdom," (in this case simply a counsel of despair): "you cannot have it both ways."

As he observes, however, "the fact is entirely otherwise . . . the very spirit of life is drawn from apparently irreconcilable opposites." Man's task is, as always, to achieve the "harmonising of the incompatible." Why else indeed has he been given the power of shaping his existence, if not thus to achieve consciously what nature achieves unconsciously at all lower levels of life? Stapledon's prophetic eye discerns in fact that the era of segregation has run its course — that a new era of integration has already dawned.

I hope that this brief summary of Stapledon's faith may give some idea of the depth and originality of the man, to which my review was able to do all too little justice; and of the importance of his book for our times.

Yours faithfully,

SHIRLEY-ANNE HARDY.

London, W.11.

LIBERALS AND THE LAND COMMISSION

SIR, — I was deeply grieved and shocked to hear Mr. Lubbock say at the Liberal Assembly that the Parliamentary Party might reconsider its decision to vote against the Government on the proposal to levy development charges on land. To support such a proposal would "torpedo" the taxation of land values and indeed is quite contrary to the principles of land-value taxation. The proposal is simply an increment tax on *some* land.

The price of land when granted "outline planning permission" bears no relation to the actual *unimproved site value*. Indeed, but for the fact of the planning authority's action in refusing development permission to the owners of certain sites, high prices for others would not be achieved. The planners' action is very little different from that of private owners who withhold their land from use for similar reasons.

And what about speculation in land that is already urbanised or developed? The proposals contain nothing to deal with the sales of such land. The owners of houses will still be able to sell and pocket the increase in site values.

The effect of levying development charges will be to increase the cost of land and to restrict its supply. One cannot compel an owner to sell. Attempts will be made by owners and developers to recoup, either by lowering standards of development or by putting up the price of building. Indeed, it is a tax on development — on labour and capital.

The central point to appreciate about land-value taxation is that its objective is to take or collect for community purposes the whole of the *economic rent of land* and this means that *the rewards of labour and the return to capital must be separated from the economic rent of land*. Therefore it is obvious that without a global valuation of land these development charges must absorb some part of wages and interest.

Yours faithfully,

STEPHEN MARTIN.

Fordingbridge, Hants.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE LAND COMMISSION

SIR,—The Land Commission White Paper, despite the deficiencies of the scheme, has had a more enthusiastic reception in some quarters than it deserved. The trouble is that land has become such an issue these days that almost any plan is accepted by the Press and by the public as better than none. Unfortunately, public attention and concern has been directed almost exclusively at *increases in land value*, and even then, only when such increases follow the granting of planning permission.

The Conservatives, fearful of being caught again without a land policy, have accepted in principle the idea of a development levy. The Liberals, not wishing to be associated with the reactionary anti-levy elements, are likely to endorse the levy even though they don't like the actual Land Commission part.

The Town and Country Planning Association has hailed the scheme as "a very sound and practical approach to a complicated problem" which "should command the widest support." The County Councils Association and the Association of Municipal Corporations welcomed the Government's objectives but have expressed some doubts about the methods to be employed.

It is probably true to say that the Land Commission proposals are regarded by the public as primarily a form of collecting unjustifiable profits arising from land development, and therefore command wide support.

What has been missed by many people, and indeed also by the Press, is that the Land Commission is an instrument for the acquisition of land, either "voluntarily" (under threat) or by powers of compulsory purchase. The forty per cent levy is an auxiliary provision designed to enable the Commission to buy land at well below market price without creating a two-tier price structure.

The effect of the Land Commission will be to transfer the freehold of a great deal of land to Government ownership—a form of creeping land nationalisation—and to cause a considerable dislocation of the land market by holding out of use even more land than is so held at present.

It is a fallacy to suppose that a Land Commission will be able to ensure that the right land is available in the right place at the right time for the various intended uses. Local authorities have for many years possessed powers similar to those of the proposed Land Commission in their own areas and it would be idle to pretend that this has had a beneficial effect. Local authorities are probably the largest hoarders of undeveloped land in the country. The Land Commission is merely an attempt to get the national government in on the act.

Whatever motives of political expediency may have prompted the welcome given to this scheme, it

must be emphasised that the Land Commission proposals have no redeeming features whatever. Expedients and makeshifts can have only one result in the long run—to make things even worse than they otherwise would have been. What is needed is a basic policy that will ensure the willing sale of land and at the same time collect *all* land value for the community, and there is only one method—a one hundred per cent tax on land rent. In the meantime, all schemes involving further control and restrictions by government bodies of any sort should be firmly resisted.

Yours faithfully,
Accrington. S. E. PARSONS.

Miscellany

Just Another Deal

FARMER Percy Atyeo sold his hayfield yesterday—for £500,000.

He bought the 102 acres, opposite Canford public school at Wimborne, Dorset, twenty-five years ago for "quite a substantial sum."

Now the field will be developed as an estate for 450 houses, churches, shops, and schools. The houses will be in the £5,000 range.

Last year at a public auction he refused an offer of £375,000 for the land, which was once the headquarters of a ten shilling a flight flying circus.

"Of course I made a profit," said Mr. Atyeo, sixty, of Egerton Road, Bournemouth. "That is why I bought it all those years ago. As far as I'm concerned it is just another deal."

—*Daily Mail*, October 16

Expensive Space

A SITE that has remained virtually unused for twenty years is to be sold for £3½ million. It is the twenty-eight acre St. Marylebone goods yard in London which Westminster City Council are to buy from British Rail for council housing.

Two comments need to be made. The first is, of course, that it is intolerable that such a huge area of valuable land should be held out of use for so long. The second is that such land is far too valuable to be used for housing.

The same comment can also be applied to Lambeth Borough Council's plan to convert office blocks to residential use. It may cost only £2,000 or

so per unit to do this, but the land cost has obviously been completely overlooked.

Such schemes, in the light of London's housing shortage, may be well intentioned, but they will never provide a satisfactory solution. Arbitrary designation of land uses will never provide the efficient land use that market forces will produce.

There is nothing wrong in paying market rents for land use—provided they are then siphoned off into the public purse by way of taxation of land values.

Dropping Bricks

THE British Government has been criticising the brick industry for not expanding faster and increasing output. The brick companies, who consider that they know the business rather better than the Government does, have been less enthusiastic about expansion.

Events are now proving them right; business has declined, bricks are being stock-piled. According to Peter Whaley, *Daily Mail* property correspondent, the Government now reckons that there are 195 million surplus bricks, and the industry considers this estimate may be low.

What hope for the National Plan?

The Forgotten Factor

THE rising price of industrial land in parts of the North-east is beginning to discourage incoming firms and to hinder local authorities and the North-East Development Council in their efforts to attract

SELF SECURITY

THE greatest security a person can have comes from within himself, not from the outside. Nothing anyone can do for you can begin to match what you can do for yourself.

—*Samuel Goldwyn*.

more industry, says a recent article in *The Guardian*. Most of the industrial land is already controlled by the local authorities.

The price of land is fixed by the district valuer who bases it on current market values. Mr. G. M. Johnson, NEDC research officer, is reported as saying: "The problem is that the more successful the area becomes in attracting new industry the more rapidly the price of land rises."

Apparently the market for sites in the North-east is so brisk that prices fixed by the district valuer have increased threefold since the development council was formed in 1961. Incoming firms are finding the price of land in some parts of the region discouraging. They expected land at between £3,000 and £4,000 an acre. The reality, Mr. Johnson said, was that in some parts prices up to £6,500 and £7,000 an acre were being sought.

One businessman on being told the price of land while touring an industrial estate at Aycliffe, Co. Durham, reports *The Guardian*, told the NEDC "I'm not buying the entire estate, I only want two acres."

The lesson to be learned from this experience is that all subsidies, grants and inducements made to industrialists and other producers to encourage