

LATIFUNDIA IN DERBYSHIRE

The pending disintegration of the Duke of Devonshire's estate in Derbyshire is causing grave concern to farmers in that county. As a first step towards meeting the death duties on the estate of the late Duke, the present Duke has ordered more than 50 farms and 4,500 acres in the Peak District to be sold, giving sitting tenants the opportunity to purchase their holdings. Any farms not so taken will be offered for sale by auction in October.

The news of this "forced sale" has prompted the county executive committee of the National Farmers' Union to call for a national investigation of how the sales of large estates will affect tenant farmers. Judging from the public statement made by Mr. Ivor Moreton, Chairman of the Derbyshire Hill Farming Committee and a member of the county executive, the farmers appear to regard as a desirable and beneficial institution the present system of territorial landlordism whereby one man is able to lay claim to thousands of acres of the national heritage and to appropriate for himself the rent which neither he nor they have created.

FARMERS FEAR BANKRUPTCY

As reported in the *Daily Telegraph*, September 14, Mr. Moreton said: "We think that it is a good thing for farmers to own their land, provided they have the necessary capital. But when large estates come on the market the farmer either gathers together all his savings and liquid capital to buy his farm, or he raises a mortgage and finds that he has to pay an interest much more than he ever pays in rent. He has no money to expand production, and he may not even have enough to maintain it at its present level. If any depression occurs these farmers will face bankruptcy on a larger scale than ever before. It is time that all political parties realized that crippling death duties mean large sums of capital are being withdrawn from agriculture and can never be replaced. Sales of large estates are forced on the landowners, farming loses what little security it has—and the huge sums demanded in death duties last Whitehall about 10 minutes. The landowner, the farm and the country, all lose in the end, and there is no gain to anyone."

Some of the sentiments thus expressed may be readily endorsed. They amount to a striking criticism of the effects of the very measures designed ostensibly to help the farming community, sought and advocated by the farmers themselves—the guaranteed prices and markets, the subventions doled out so liberally, the exemption of agricultural land from contribution to local taxation, the restrictions on imports. Each is crystallized ultimately in enhanced land value. When farms are sold the purchaser has to pay a private individual not only a monopoly price for permission to use a certain number of acres of a given quality in a particular locality (which is, itself, an intolerable iniquity), but he has also to pay the capitalized value of the various government-given gifts of dubious value, on the assumption that these will continue to be dispensed. Such a man lives on the edge of a precipice. Subsidies are ephemeral; mortgage repayments are not; the government has but to reduce or withdraw the subsidies or to liberalize trade and bankruptcy will stare him in the face.

But what has this to do with death duties and the breaking up of large estates? The man who enters the agricultural industry to-day, buying his holding from a small farmer who wishes to retire to the city, is in precisely

SKETCH MAP OF SCOTLAND

(Specially drawn by Stephen Martin)



the same position economically. The price he pays is no less than that paid by the sitting tenant who purchases from a Duke hounded by the Inland Revenue. This is not to defend estate duties. So far as they fall upon buildings and improvements, that is to say, upon the work of men's hands, they are to be condemned as morally and economically indefensible, a penalty imposed upon enterprise, varying in severity according to the degree to which an estate has been developed.

FOR A PROSPEROUS AGRICULTURE

The choice confronting the farming industry is not, as presented by Mr. Moreton in his statement limited to whether it is more desirable to farm as the tenant of a ducal landowner, or of the State (farmers, he said, did not want the Government to assume the rôle of landlord), or to purchase one's farm. There is a fourth alternative and one that would be of advantage to every working farmer, namely, the right of private title to the land subject absolutely to an annual payment to the local and national exchequer of an amount equal to the value of the bare land of the holding, periodically reassessed, and with remission of taxes on buildings and improvements, purchases and earnings. Given that they understood properly the implications of such a proposal how many farmers would not choose this alternative? It is fair to assume that only those whose income is derived predominantly from subsidy-swollen land value would refrain from such choice. They are the farmers for whom, to quote Mr. Moreton, it is "a very good thing" to own their land.

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