

Government bench. The Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Mr. George Brown, described it as "mischievous," which is just what you would expect from the bureaucratic mind. It is an affront to make sport of the planned economy.

Nevertheless this Tory critic, Mr. Osborne, was on extremely weak ground, like all the Tory critics of Socialism and its methods. The Tories have brought it about that agriculture and industry and commerce are in the grip of subsidies and State regimentation (for you cannot have the one without the other), and we have seen the progressive evolution of the policies which Tories and Socialists have combined to saddle upon the country. Out of landlordism, out of Protectionism (which the Socialists, fellow-travellers with the Tories, have but helped and applauded) have come these disastrous expedients.

Roman Price Fixing

"State control of prices, though characteristic of the Atomic Age, is no new thing. One of the most ambitious attempts in this direction was the Maximum Price Edict which the Roman emperor Diocletian promulgated in A.D. 301. He thought that ex-Service men were being fleeced by profiteers who did not allow abundant supplies or plentiful harvests to check their rapacity. The edict is comprehensive enough and fixes maximum prices for such things as oil, salt, honey, butcher's meat, poultry, game, fish, vegetables, fruit, the wages of labourers and artisans, schoolmasters and orators, clothes, skins, boots and shoes, harness, timber, corn, wine, and beer.

"The penalty for black marketeers was death or deportation, but in spite of that the edict could not be successfully applied. The prices fixed were the same for the whole of the Roman Empire and took no account of varying local conditions. The result of the unsuccessful attempt to apply it was severe shortages in non-productive countries and the ruin of many traders, so that the edict soon fell into abeyance. A Victorian commentator, happy in his ignorance of what totalitarianism can do, describes the Maximum Edict as the most gigantic effort of a blind though well-intentioned despotism to control that which is, and ought to be, beyond the regulation of any Government.

"Diocletian's edict is briefly referred to by the Christian writer Lactantius, but the actual text of it was not discovered till the eighteenth century and seems to have been unknown to Gibbon."—"Miscellany" in the *Manchester Guardian*, February 18th.

Bedfordshire Smallholdings

Mr. T. Williams, Minister of Agriculture, did not give Mr. R. R. Stokes all the information asked for on 19th July. The House was told that since 1918 the Bedfordshire County Council have established and still retain 881 smallholdings comprising 7,343 acres. 4,895 acres were purchased and equipped at a capital cost of £417,878. The remaining land was purchased by annuities or is held on lease. The Council have 103 applicants on their books but none of these has so far been interviewed. There is an estimated deficiency of £5,290 on the county's smallholdings account for the current financial year. This is equivalent to the product of a 3d. rate and takes account of holdings established before 1918 as well as since that date.

The cost of acquiring and equipping the smallholdings comprised in the 4,895 acres thus averaged £85 per acre

and the cost has been so high that smallholdings are run at a dead loss. The other ratepayers, subsidising the smallholders have to find that annual deficit of £5,290.

The questions not answered were: What is the number of smallholdings established in the last 30 years? What expenditure was incurred in acquiring the land, apart from expenses on equipment? What is the area, the price of the land and the costs of equipment in each case? That information is important. Why is it withheld? Secrecy always suggests there is something to be ashamed of. Requests for the facts addressed on our own part to the County Offices in Bedford have met with a blank refusal.

Action in Rio de Janeiro

The United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values has received the following important communication, under date August 9th, from Mr. Americo Wernecke, junior:—

"The Mayor of Rio de Janeiro has sent a Bill to the City Council proposing the reform of the real estate tax (*imposto predial*). This reform would base the collection of the tax on the actual value of the lot where buildings stand, instead of the rental value as hitherto. In other words, the present real estate tax would be abolished and replaced by a tax on the land values with exemption of the buildings. This is a great step towards the single tax proposed by Henry George in *Progress and Poverty* as a solution for the social and economic problems of mankind.

"A considerable work is now being done through the Press to explain the principles and fundamentals of the new taxing system. The best way to convince people of the advantage of a new plan would be to show examples of its successful application in other instances.

"I am turning to you for help in our present campaign to introduce the land value taxation in this city. I would thank you very much if you could send me publications referring to the application of the land value tax in other cities (Sydney, Wellington, etc.). I would like specially to have practical data on the results obtained in such places and I trust that the publication of these results would contribute greatly to the success of our campaign."

Mr. Wernecke is on the staff of the Rio de Janeiro tax collecting department. He is the translator of *Progress and Poverty* into Portuguese. Receiving his message with gratification and eager to assist to the best of our capacity, we have sent Mr. Wernecke very comprehensive material relating to the operation of Land Value Taxation in other countries together with relevant literature on the subject. This is indeed the competent service which the information bureau of the United Committee and the International Union exists to render.

Freedom Questionnaire

Answers to the following questions will be found on page 163.

- (1) What is the origin and meaning of the "most favoured nation clause" in commercial treaties?
- (2) The principle of Income Tax is usually assumed to be beyond discussion. Do the circumstances in which this tax was first introduced support this assumption?
- (3) Conservatives usually assume that Protectionism is an innate principle of their party. Do the facts justify this?