

*De Gasperi's Land Reform in Italy*

THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT has announced the terms of its proposed agrarian reform. In essence, it is not aimed at the agrarian problem as a whole, but at a specific aspect of it, the latifundia problem. From 20 to 50 per cent of estates ranging in area from 240 acres upward are to be expropriated for compensation in cash and state bonds, to provide 3,120,000 acres for distribution among several hundred thousand landless peasants, along with water, roads and technical assistance.

One interesting feature of the proposal, pointed out by the Rome correspondent of *The Economist* of London in the issue of May 7, 1949, is that a national institute will select the new proprietors and they will receive tenure largely in the form of emphyteusis, under which they would receive absolute titles after paying rent in kind over a certain period of years. It has been suggested that the period be fixed at ninety-nine years. A development of this form of tenure was presented in the land reform that was proposed for Argentina by the celebrated nineteenth century land reformer, Bernardo Rivadavia.

As it stands, this would be an interesting first step toward scientific land reform in Italy. But it would be a first step only. It would deal with the immediate situation in which only the Communist extremists have a complete program, one that would exploit the peasants' land hunger in order to foist upon them the Soviet system of agriculture with its collective farms and its State farms and its total loss of human liberty. A thorough reform would still be needed. But it can only be achieved if the Christian Democrats and democratic Socialists prepare the way for it by a thoroughgoing educational campaign.

The *Economist* correspondent provides some interesting figures, taken from the report of Giuseppe Medici, president of the National Institute of Agrarian Economy, on the need for thoroughgoing reform. There are more than 9,000,000 owners. Eight million own one-sixth of the surface (having an annual taxable value, not at all well assessed, of one-fifth of the total). One-quarter of the soil is owned by 21,000 and 15,000 of these together have much more than one-fifth the total revenue. The 5,000,000 smallest and the 500 largest owners have, respectively, 875,000 and 975,000 hectares. This is, as Signor de Medici says, a "pathological distribution." Only a thoroughgoing reform, based on the socialization of rent and designed to make the land of Italy available to those who will cultivate it and take it away from those who have been living in parasitical leisure from the fruits of absentee ownership, will meet the demands of justice.

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