

The Land Question in Italy

BEFORE THE WAR the need for land reform in Italy was obvious to any serious student of Italian conditions. Dr. Carl Schmidt showed from the agricultural census of 1930 the extreme concentration of land ownership in relatively few hands. This put the total number of farm enterprises in Italy at about 4,200,000. Of these, 1,500,000 (35.7 per cent) were one hectare (2.47 acres) or less in size; 2,300,000 (54.6 per cent) were more than one and less than ten hectares in area; about 400,000 (9.7 per cent) covered more than ten hectares. The 3,800,000 dwarf and small holdings comprised but 32.7 per cent of all the farm land in the country, Dr. Schmidt pointed out, whereas the 400,000 large farms controlled 67.3 per cent of the country's land.

The Italians got rid of Mussolini and his fascist regime, but not of the large landowners who were the basis of its support. Dr. Leopold C. Klausner, former director general of the Pan-European Union, in a thought-provoking review of the Italian situation in *The New Leader*, New York, reports that today the big landowners receive 45 per cent of the whole agricultural income of the country, although they comprise no more than 1 per cent of the 20,000,000 peasants.

One per cent of the group receiving 45 per cent of the income! Nearly half the Italian population consists of peasants. One-half these peasants are sharecroppers, *mezzadri*, who do not own their land and who have to give up 50 per cent of their crops to the parasites who have titles to it, their masters, the *padroni*, who are mostly aristocrats and high officials.

The Communists and other extremists would deal with the question by passing a law breaking up all large landholdings by one fell swoop, a measure which would block the introduction of scientific family-type farming by creating chaos. When will democratic land reformers in Italy develop an adequate program based on abolition of monopoly by socialization of land rent? One of the greatest mistakes of the Italian reformers of the nineteenth century, Dr. Klausner points out, was that they neglected the interests of the peasants. As he says, it would be disastrous if the leaders of the future Italy should repeat this mistake. Italy needs an improved tenure system, extension and credit programs and a vast network of producer and consumer co-operatives.