

Government should sell the railways. Whom have we to fear? We have no advertising revenue, subsidy, special privilege or votes, to consider and so are free to speak frankly on matters of public interest which fall within our compass and to let the chips fall where they may. So far as possible we endeavour always to blame measures, not men.

In the article Mr. Howell criticises it was made clear that the ideal solution, in our view, would be for the rail bed and related fixed capital equipment to remain in state ownership and for competing private firms, paying a rent, to operate services. Desirably the cost of maintaining and augmenting the state-owned basic capital equipment should be met out of a charge on land values. The next best course would be to restore the railways to private enterprise by selling them in units at auction. It is difficult to believe that there are sections which are so useless that even the scrap merchants would not bid a few pounds for the rails, etc., but if such were the case they would have to remain *in situ*, to be removed by whoever subsequently bought the land. Taxpayers do not want them. It is worth reflecting that if they were useless before nationalisation, the Labour Government spent tax monies on pigs in a poke. If they have become useless *since* vesting day, this affords some comment on nationalisation in practice.

As demand would be weak, branch lines which at present are uneconomic would be sold "for a song." On such terms there are not lacking people who in many places would be willing to sink their money into one or two diesel cars and to offer a service. If it failed, that would be their affair. Private bus companies would similarly provide transport to outlying areas. Fares might be higher than in urban areas but offsetting this is the fact that land is cheaper to buy or rent there.

The logical extension of the idea that railways are a service which everyone must enjoy wherever he lives is not merely that no lines should ever be closed, however uneconomic, but that lines should be laid, irrespective of cost, to every remote hamlet and hillside just as electricity is being taken to the most inaccessible farms.

If the railways were privately owned, they would be run at a profit. If they were profitable they would experience no greater difficulty in raising capital than do other profitable private industries. If, however, they could not be run at a profit that would mean that millions of people had chosen not to travel by rail. Why should such people be compelled as they are at present, to support the railways?

Our proposals are designed to achieve what Mr. Howell desires, namely, a railway system giving an efficient service *at an economic charge* which is not a pawn in the game of politics. Since he ascribes their present "chaotic position" to deliberate Conservative policy and must recognise that in the nature of things the present is unlikely to be the last Conservative administration to hold office during this century, Mr. Howell ought to welcome our

constructive plan for removing the railways from the arena of party politics.

COMMON MARKET AND FREE TRADE

To the Editor of Land and Liberty.

Sir,—The article "The Common Market and Free Trade" (L. & L. Jan.) is disappointing to say the least of it.

In the points he makes against both the Common Market and the (so-called) European Free Trade Area, Mr. Lyndon Jones makes it clear that these multilateral arrangements are not only conspiracies against the rest of the world, but against their own peoples to boot. One wonders therefore why he does not unhesitatingly condemn them as such. Neither is likely to serve the Free Trade cause in any other office but to bring it into disrepute. This is the case by virtue of the fact that as "Free Trade Areas" were conceived by protectionist British Governments there are now large numbers of people who fondly imagine that it is possible to have Free Trade whilst retaining a tariff structure. Reference to the nearest dictionary will show any enquiring person that this is not the case. Unfortunately very few people bother to enquire, either in that direction or any other. It is a constant source of annoyance that Free Traders allow this hypocrisy to proceed unproved.

In concluding that a return to Free Trade is imperative Mr. Jones states that whether this can come through a multilateral approach or whether it means going it alone is of secondary importance. In the name of the prophet *nuts!*

A multilateral approach "such as working through the G.A.T.T." can achieve absolutely nothing. In the first place a protectionist British Government is unlikely to do anything of the sort. In the second place, even if it did it would be conferring with other protectionist governments which would be akin to a conclave of Archangels deciding whether to admit the Devil to heaven.

The answer is obvious. Firstly to secure a Free Trading British Government. Secondly to go it alone. It is to this task that Free Traders should address themselves.

Yours faithfully,

JOHN C. COOK.

Wells, Somerset.

EDUCATION IN A FREE SOCIETY

To the Editor of Land & Liberty,

Sir,—Public education involves force, says Robert D. Benton (L. & L. Jan.)—force to compel attendance and force to compel one family to pay for the education of another family's children.

However, our compulsory education laws do not require that parents enrol their children in public schools. Parents may educate their children themselves or enrol them in private schools, provided only that the standards are adequate. Compulsory education laws aim to prevent the force involved in parental abuse or neglect. The existence of these laws is no indictment of public education. Public schools could continue well without

them, and they would probably remain in some form were public schools abolished.

As for forcing one family to pay for the education of another family's children, the financing of public schools involves no more compulsion than the financing of any other public service. A family with ten children may walk the public sidewalks, ride in the public streets, browse in the public library, study in the public school, bruise in the public playground and mend in the public hospital, while a childless couple next door putter all day in their garden. But provided these services are equally accessible to the childless couple, no force is inflicted upon them when their land taxes are used to help pay the bill. For public services, even though not unanimously approved, add materially to land values and generate their own support. A childless couple not desiring these public services, not wishing to pay the higher land taxes due where they are available, has the alternative of moving to a community offering services they prefer or of moving to less valuable land and puttering all day in peace.

Our imperfect tax system, with its consequent overgrowth of unsupervised government, should not blind us to the truth that public services, properly financed and controlled—as our public schools to a large extent still are—are an inestimable asset to a community. Public functions, especially schools, knit men together, dispelling clannishness and bigotry. "People hate each other and despise each other just in proportion as they are kept separate from each other," said Henry George (*The Standard*, Jan. 21, 1888), "and the most important lesson which many a boy and girl learn in our public schools is that children of other faiths, which the narrower teachings of home and Sunday School might lead them to despise, are just as intelligent, just as conscientious, just as kindly, and just as lovable as anyone else. To our public schools more than to any other of our institutions is due the growth of that spirit of toleration between various creeds which is so marked in the United States."

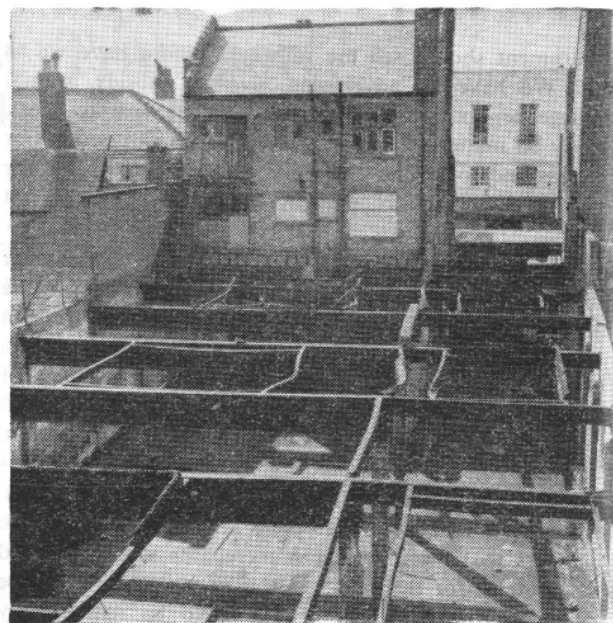
Yours faithfully,
ROBERT TIDEMAN

Henry George School of Social Science,
San Francisco 3, California.

Continued from next column

If sites only were assessed for local tax purposes, the rateable value would be in the region of £5,400, twelve or thirteen times the present figure. Because this valuable property is contributing considerably less than its fair share in rates other properties are compelled to pay more than theirs. But as soon as a modern building is erected on the site, and is occupied, the rating assessment will soar.

This instance is by no means unique: similar examples can be found throughout Britain. The rating of land values would redress this obvious anomaly; the new Rating and Valuation Bill will leave it untouched.



Copyright, County of Middlesex Chronicle.

£2,160 A Foot Frontage

**HOUNSLOW SHOP SITE FETCHES
257 TIMES RATEABLE VALUE**

THE double shop at 142-144 High Street, Hounslow, Middlesex, was gutted by fire caused by a German incendiary bomb dropped in 1940. After the war Sainsburys, the provisions merchants, bought the site for redevelopment but did not proceed. The greater part of the site, as our picture from the rear shows, has remained vacant for twenty years. No. 142 is recorded in the rate book as "offices and store room premises" with a rateable value of £98 but these have stood vacant since April 1956, and accordingly have contributed not a penny for five years to municipal income.

A lock-up library bookstall, assessed at a low figure, occupied the High Street frontage to No. 144 for some years. Then the National Provincial Bank took over the property, converting it into temporary banking premises while their premises on the opposite site of the road were being redeveloped. The temporary bank has a rateable value of £398 and an advertisement hoarding is assessed at £22.

The double shop site is thus deemed to be worth £420 a year in its present condition. Its actual value is rather more as was revealed when the property was sold by auction in London on January 24.

The *Daily Telegraph* reported that the freehold property made £108,000. It has a frontage of almost 50 feet and a total site area of 5,175 sq. feet. In other words, land in this part of Hounslow High Street, opposite Marks and Spencer's store but not the most valuable part of the town, is worth more than £2,160 a foot front or roughly £186 a square yard.

(continued previous column)