

## "Lebensraum" - Holland's Way and Hitler's

By SIDNEY J. ABELSON

There is an especially ironic note in the Nazi invasion of Holland. The Hitler sweep into the Netherlands serves to bring out in sharp relief a contrast between two antipodal methods of social conquest: one, the struggle of man against man; the other, the struggle of man against natural obstacles. The Nazis are seeking to enlarge their "Lebensraum" by wresting land from other peoples; the Dutch enlarged their "Lebensraum" by reclaiming land from the floor of the sea. The Zuider Zee project, on the way to completion when the military hordes swooped in from the East, is an epic

feat of engineering and an eloquent testimonial to the civilized instincts of man.

It is perhaps worth while at this stage of history, when men through ignorance of the true laws of progress are striking out blindly and brutally in an effort to solve the problem of poverty, to picture this contrast and explain its significance. The Dutch example is a precept as well, though it is not likely that the example will be copied or the precept heeded by other nations until the energies of brute force have been fully spent and doctrines of enlightenment have taken their place as

arbiters of social action.

As this is being written the fate of Holland remains unknown. But whichever way the tides of battle flow the fact will remain that when the Hollanders needed more living space they sought it in the undeveloped bounties of nature and not in plunder from fellow men. This is an old Dutch custom, for the Netherlands have been expert in the reclamation of land for a thousand years. As a matter of fact almost half of this little country, which has a density of population that is exceeded by only one other nation (Belgium) lies below the level of

high tide water, while approximately one-fourth of her territory is underneath the line of mean sea level; hence the famous system of dikes.

No less than 550,000 acres of fertile land would have been added to the "Lebensraum" of Holland by completion of the Zuider Zee project. The Zuider Zee was a large gulf of the North Sea flanked on three sides by lowlands. Much of it is now fertile farmland cultivated like any other agricultural area and settled with farmsteads that to all appearances might just as well be a thousand miles inland instead of, as they are, on the floor of the sea, from 13 to 16 feet below mean water level.

The problem of converting the floor of a salt water sea into an agricultural settlement was an engineering one, noteworthy in itself; but more important is the social point of view which motivated it under such circumstances. Population pressure was a real problem in Holland. With an area of only 12,692 square miles her inhabitants number more than 8,500,000. The State of Maryland, having an area of 12,300 square miles, is nearly as large as the Netherlands, but it has less than one-fifth the population (1,631,500). The Dutch had the choice of reducing their standard of living, forcing their people to overseas colonies, begging the rest of the world for help—or reclaiming land from the angry North Sea. They chose the last policy. Whether the virtue of it will serve to bring its own reward is now a matter of conjecture, for the good work of the Hollanders will be so much more booty for Hitler if his Nazi machine is victorious.

Three hundred thousand people will be settled on the one-time floor of the Zuider Zee when all the reclamation work is completed. These will not all be farmers or members of farm families, for the settlement program calls for the normal development of villages and town activities which complement agriculture. Nor will the settlement of the land be in the nature of a hit-or-miss proposition: sampling of the ocean floor before the project was undertaken showed which sections are suitable for wheat growing, which for truck crops, or for pasture or

for timberland. Thirty-four thousand such samples established scientifically the maximum usefulness of each portion of the reclaimed area.

Of especial interest to those who recognize the fundamental role that land plays in economic and social life is that provision had been made to prevent these advantages from accruing to the benefit of land speculators or monopolists. Though the land was not to be thrown on the open market, which of course would be the only way to determine its true value, the government had provided for the collection of an annual rental which might correspond roughly to the economic rent. Beginning at \$12 per acre this rental was to be increased gradually in correspondence with increased productivity of the land until it reached a maximum of about \$21 per acre. This procedure was not designed as a permanent policy, but rather as a method for retrieving the cost of the project; data on hand do not indicate whether with that goal achieved the land was or was not intended to become the private property of the farmers who worked it.

It must be observed that this is not strictly a land value taxation procedure, but it should likewise be noted that it recognizes one of the basic principles of land value taxation; that land speculation retards production. At least for some time to come there could have been no outright withholding of land from production, though it is difficult to see how private speculative profits could be avoided when a uniform rental is charged on land which despite its uniformity is bound to differ in productivity, if not for reasons of fertility, certainly for those of site advantage.

Inasmuch as the Nazi invaders, at this writing, have already reached the Zuider Zee, which had no major military protection, all discussion of its social objectives must be tentative or purely theoretical. Hitler is incapable of such a civilized constructive effort as the Zuider Zee project; his leadership, from the very start, has been devoted to destruction or preparation for destruction. One does not have to be a follower of George or a believer in

land value taxation to recognize the polarities of human character brought out in this phase of the war, i.e. the invasion of Holland. On the one hand we see thrift and industry, on the other wanton wastefulness and a barbaric spirit of plunder. There it is, a lesson for the whole world to learn: the two ways to gain "Lebensraum"—Holland's and Hitler's.