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Buying Up England

A HIDEOUS DEMONSTRATION of our unsocial land tenure system comes from England. Bombed areas are being bought up by land speculators with the purpose of demanding high prices when the inevitable reconstruction begins after the war.

Public indignation over this practice takes the usual form of vituperation of the land vultures, with little or no attention to the law which permits the trade. Such press phrases as "Blitz Brigands," "Bomb Profiteers," "Crater Snatchers," "Birds of Prey" and "Land Leeches" do credit to English sensibilities; but they reveal no grasp of the fundamental fact that the treatment of land as absolute private property makes possible this profiteering on the people's misfortunes.

Already land values, according to *The Manchester Evening News*, have jumped ten to twenty times the pre-war quotations, and every hit made by a German bomb, by reducing the available building space, will add to the loot of the land-grabbers.

More important, rising land prices will retard the reconstruction of the country; the English press points out that the plan of Sir Christopher Wren for the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire was wrecked by the cupidity of the wealthy landowners of that time. The laws which permit the private appropriation of rent are still in force.

The British Government has taken cognizance of the situation by appointing a committee—the usual claptrap—to make "an objective analysis of the subject of *compensation and recovery* of betterment in respect of public control of the use of land." We emphasize "compensation and recovery" because these words bear out the opinion of a London correspondent that the whole thing is window dressing for the repurchase of the land by the government—at speculative prices.

The British Government still belongs to the landlords.