

## England Plans Her Future

SEVERAL MONTHS AGO we reported on what approached a public scandal in England: the buying up of bombed areas by land speculators. Resentment toward such brazen opportunism at the expense of the nation's misfortunes was so bitter that the government could not ignore it. Public indignation suggested a possible attack on the very system of land tenure which is the basis of the social and political status in England as well as in other countries. A committee was appointed to investigate and recommend.

The committee—significantly called the "Expert Committee on Compensation and Betterment"—recently issued an interim report which blasts the hope, entertained by some, that any fundamental reform could be looked for. From detailed reviews of the report in both *The Economist* and *Land and Liberty*, we gather that the objectives toward which the committee is striving fall under these two main categories:

1. A formula for fixing the prices to be paid for land required for the country's reconstruction.
2. A plan for directing and controlling the use of land in the interests of reconstruction.

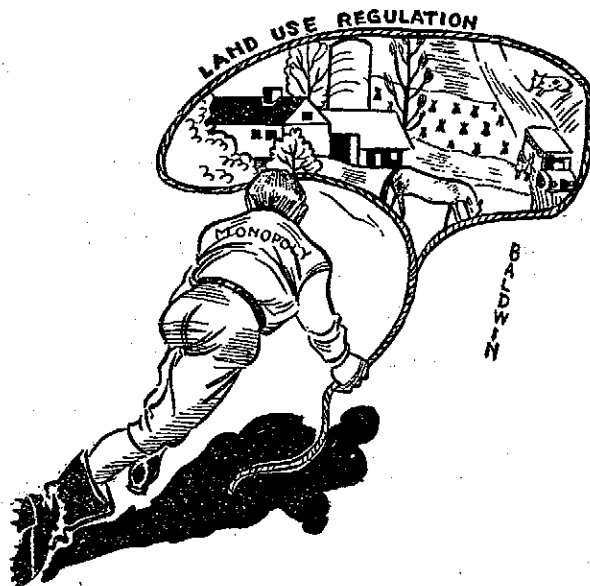
Naively the committee comments that speculation in land has been moderate during the war; "the situation at or towards the end of hostilities will be far more favorable to speculative dealings than the present." Quite true. It is only when production starts that land prices go up, for it is then that the demand for land becomes imperative. So, the committee has in mind the fixing of "compensation . . . (which) will not exceed sums based on the standard of pre-war values."

This is palpably an attempt to appease the speculators and the public with a "fair price," and it is reported that by this is meant values as of March, 1939. The reason, it seems, is that the pre-war speculator, the one who took advantage of the country's defense boom, is less reprehensible than the one who seeks to profit by the shooting war. When moral principles are warped by expediency some strange conclusions are arrived at.

However, since England has no land assessment system, how can the 1939 value of any piece of land be determined? The re-shifting of population during the war may have made a village out of a farm area. Will the condemnation price be by the acre or by the lot? Will a 1939 vacant lot bring

the same as a comparable one with a bombed house on it, and will there not be a tendency to do a little speculating in the land via the rubbish?

The difficulties of arriving at present values are as nothing to any attempt to resuscitate yesterday's values. Nor need we muddy the waters with any thought of self-interest on the part of assessors, appraisers, judges, lawyers and others who may be involved in the impossible task. Yet it cannot be denied that the most patriotic of men who have some stake in the private ownership of land may look with favor upon a speculator's claim for higher compensation. There is no way of being honest with stolen property.



But of even greater social importance than the committee's search for a compensation formula are the proposals to regulate and control the use of the land after it has been acquired. Other British agencies than the committee referred to take the same tack.

Since all production requires the use of land, it is obvious that when the government decides how land may be used it also decides what may be produced. The control of agricultural land suggests a commissar's decision as to whether people shall have milk or berries; the control of factory land may make it necessary for the government to determine how many shoes one may have each year.

None of these things is actually being proposed. But it follows as the night the day that the plan-

ning of land use is the planning of production. Even aesthetic "town planning" might result in shaping production according to a pre-conceived blueprint rather than the needs of the market place.

Thus we learn that the general direction of England's post-war policy is now toward the safeguarding of its land tenure system within the framework of a socialistic economy. And those of us who had hoped that a fundamental reform, as a fiscal necessity, would ensue from England's catastrophe must

now realize that no crisis, not even a revolution, can bring about such a reform where public ignorance of it prevails. The people of England will try some sort of socialistic regime because for generations they have been told of its promise by the vociferous intelligentsia; the thin voice of their land tenure reformers was effectively drowned out by the monopolists to whom any change, including socialism, is preferable to a frontal attack on their basic privilege.