



Born in Kilkenny Town in 1925, Raymond Crotty left school in 1943, and spent the next three years on various farms, including one year at a State Agricultural College. Since then he has owned his present 200-acre farm, Carn, at Dunbell in Co. Kilkenny. His initial policy of using modern methods to secure high output proving financially unsuccessful, he switched to his present policy, which he says is reasonably successful financially, of low input—low output, with high regard for traditional methods.

An Irish Farmer's Discovery

By RAYMOND CROTTY

IT IS a truism that man's wellbeing depends in the main on the natural resources available to him and on the use he makes of them. In few places can this be more readily apparent than in Ireland where the basic truth is not obscured by a vast superstructure of capital accumulation and commercial organisation. In Ireland living standards are intimately and obviously dependent upon land usage, and more specifically, farm productivity. On our farm produce we rely to feed ourselves and to provide the exportable surplus with which to buy those requirements of life which it is physically impossible or economically impracticable—an extremely flexible term—to produce at home. In view of the extremely low level of Irish farm technical efficiency relative to other comparable countries and the obvious room for technical improvement, a farming career in Ireland would appear to offer good prospects of financial success and for making a practical, if minute, contribution to the solution of Ireland's seemingly perennial social problems.

There is no need here to dwell at length on the nature and acuteness of these problems: already enough tears have been spilt on them. Suffice it to say that they are epitomised in a population decline during the last century from more than 8,000,000 to less than 4,000,000. The position has been aggravated over the past 35 years by the realisation that the cause of our troubles, which had hitherto been placed fairly and squarely on the unwanted connection with Britain, lay in fact with ourselves and our institutions, since the troubles continued unabated notwithstanding the severance of the connection.

The "experts" repeat *ad nauseum* that financial success in Irish farming depends on the adoption of modern, technically efficient methods. Most of them get no nearer to a farm than a fireside seat where they indulge their fertile imaginations and fill copious notebooks.

Speaking as a practical farmer, I know from long personal experience that the means of individual, and, by implication, national prosperity must be sought elsewhere.

No one can farm at more than half cock in Ireland for long without becoming aware of a cloying plethora of inflated costs and restricting regulations. These make themselves apparent first at the more obvious points. For instance, artificial manures sell at perhaps 40 per cent above world prices, thanks to a tariff barrier protecting a forty-year-old "infant" fertiliser industry. Similarly the costs of raw materials are artificially enhanced by the inefficiency of the state transport monopoly, or by the costs and risks of circumventing it. There is, in fact, a massive structure of needlessly high raw materials and marketing costs in Irish agriculture. This forms a barrier to more intensive and technically efficient production which the ordinary farmer finds utterly impassable although it is no obstacle to several government subsidised institutions and wealthy amateurs. This cost barrier is wholly the consequence of deliberate government action, in the form of either tariff imposition or monopoly creation. Paradoxically, however, while governments by their economic and fiscal policies have hindered agricultural output, they have simultaneously sought to cajole, bribe and threaten farmers in attempts to secure the increased farm production which is recognised by all as the *sine qua non* of national prosperity. Their efforts have been in vain. This may be seen in the statistics which show that the volume of Irish farm production has not changed during the last half century. In comparable countries such as Denmark, Holland, New Zealand and even Britain production during the same period has expanded by leaps and bounds.

Without feeling competent to judge the merits of the ends sought by Government policy, I realised that the means used were of their nature destructive. Searching for alternative means it seemed evident that assuming the inevitability of taxation on the farmer a more rational way of taxing him would be on the land he held and not the use he made of it. Accordingly, I developed and canvassed the idea of direct land taxes in place of a host of crippling taxes and restrictions on production and the means of production. I pointed out that such a form of taxation would give the progressive, productive farmer the opportunity to make profit and would compel the unprogressive farmer to improve his methods. Among those I canvassed was a politician of high position and

high repute with whom I was slightly acquainted. Very kindly and at considerable length he criticised my thesis and suggested that it held much in common with the teachings of a nineteenth century American political-economist, Henry George, whose book, *Progress and Poverty*, he sent to me at Christmas, 1954.

"Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his kin."

Here, lucidly, rationally and completely unfolded, was the knowledge which I had by a series of accidents stumbled upon and as yet but barely comprehended. Here was the theory which I had attempted to establish empirically, rounded out, completed and unshakably supported by the deductive process on a few economic and moral axioms.

With this knowledge, coupled with practical farming experience, it was possible for me to make a much deeper analysis of the Irish situation. Briefly, this revealed an economy whose industrial and commercial sectors were so overloaded with taxation and government imposed restrictions that they could only hope to operate at high prices and therefore behind a tariff wall, with no prospect of expanding into export markets. Agriculture practically alone provided the substantial export surplus with which to engage in foreign trade. But while the prices of farm produce were determined within narrow limits by the prices obtained for the exported surplus on the world's markets, costs were adversely affected by severe tariffs and numerous other price-raising restrictions. It became obvious that so long as stupid restrictions were imposed and maintained by governments under pressure from insatiable vested interests, the Irish people would be denied the fruits of social progress and the benefits which could accrue from better farming.

Ireland today presents an object lesson in the evils that result from monopoly of land, and its seemingly inseparable concomitant, trade protection. If the barricades are not down, if our legislators do not adorn the lamp-posts, if murder, fire and pillage no longer stalk the land in agrarian agitation, it is not because old wrongs are righted but because new symptoms are too easily removed. The causal evil remains and the nation, the body politic, is inexorably decaying as a result. The internal pressure that would otherwise develop and compel some solution of these problems is prevented by all too easy emigration. (Much of this Henry George foresaw in his book *The (Irish) Land Question*). The emigrant ships remove some of the embarrassing symptoms of serious social maladjustment. But they also take away the consciousness, the spirit and pride, the quiet self-confidence of nationhood and feeling of belonging to no mean city. Into the vacuum there floods a spurious, self-consciously aggressive patriotism that reveals itself in incontinent symbolism, verbose protestations of righteousness and a dismal xenophobia.

What are the prospects of improvement? We are "all tarred with the ain stick" of monopoly, each in his niche concerned solely to carve deeper for himself without

thought of the general social good. The farmer bristles at his present hardly more than nominal land taxes, and demands guaranteed prices for all sorts of products that could be produced better and cheaper elsewhere. The industrialist and the industrial worker demand tariff protection. And so on. Monopoly is widespread and deeply entrenched. Its victims—those who could be relied upon to press for change, have for the most part disappeared. Yet I hesitate to say that the Irish are irrevocably fated to be cast among those miserable races who through failure to adopt their institutions to prevailing conditions, have been removed from this globe. To the acute, and perhaps over-optimistic, observer there are factors which seem to hold promise of improvement, if carefully and skilfully exploited.

To the Editor

EUROPEAN TRADE

From Mr. B. A. Levinson, London, S.W.1.

THE Common Market and the Free Trade Area are subjects which raise intensely difficult problems but, in their essence, I venture to urge that they call for more sympathetic treatment than you express.

Freedom of Trade is a world-wide *desideratum*. Naturally we consider it from our own country's point of view but we who are convinced adherents to the cause welcome its adoption by other countries. Is it not therefore true to say that the establishment of Free Trade over a wide area, covering several countries, is an event and a purpose calling for general satisfaction?

Some important qualifications are needed for the United Kingdom of the Commonwealth, but the fear which our late friend A. W. Madsen expressed that, for us, it would be a protectionist manoeuvre I for one do not share.

May I suggest that you return to this engrossing subject from the point of view I have endeavoured to express?

[We regard these schemes not so much as an additional protectionist evil as a mere re-arrangement of existing protectionism. They depend upon the maintenance of trade barriers. Government, not consumers, will determine the pattern of international commerce. Trade will not be free. Readers' comments are invited.—ED., L&L.]

LAND-VALUE TAXATION AT SOUTHPORT

From Dr. Roy Douglas

THE story of land value taxation at the recent Liberal Assembly is extremely brief. None of the selected resolutions made any reference to it whatever. The Bethnal Green & South Hackney Liberal Association sought to introduce an amendment to a general Executive resolution which dealt with taxation, to demand the

Land & Liberty