purchase of the land. In either event the "development value" of which he may be deprived, by having to accept no more than the price of the "existing use," will be wholly or partly made up to him out of that fund.

It is apparently anticipated that an interval will elapse between the passing and the enforcement of the Act, requiring the special provision that the purchase price of land acquired during that interval shall be referable to values current on 7th January, 1947. That date, as it happens, coincides with the provisions for assessing the "development values" on the basis of which the land owners who are entitled to it will receive their allotment of the £300,000,000 compensation fund.

Other conceptions of value arise when the time comes for the Central Land Board to impose its development charge as the price of permission to develop. What a picture is presented of confliction and complexity, with valuations to be made on this date and that, for this or that purpose, and subject to all sorts of assumptions and hypotheses varying according to the circumstances. Assessors and arbitrators will not easily thread their way through this mess and maze. The Bill is an administrative monstrosity and the doom is also upon it for the social and financial wickedness it would perpetrate.

As originally drawn, the Bill provided for the 1939 current values of land as the basis of the price of land acquired for public purposes. This was to have come to an end in 1949 and it is now abolished. The new basis will entail a considerably increased expenditure of public funds in landlord compensation, and there will have to be revised estimates of the costs which were already immense —for example, the £600,000,000 for the blitzed and blighted areas, the "New Towns" at £19,000,000 apiece, the extensive projects in the Agriculture Bill (the provisions against restricting the price of agricultural land is highly significant), and the whole gamut of land purchase schemes for housing, schools, open spaces and the rest. The 1939 value was itself a monopoly value and operating upon it the Government has paid or caused local authorities to pay prices amounting in total to a fabulous sum (and corresponding addition to the public debt) for land which for the most part, despite its high value, was rated at a nominal figure or not rated at all. Every public land purchase robs the community of its rightful revenue which is the value of land and compels the resort to ever more taxation on industry and its earnings. And it is this iniquitous and disastrous policy which the Government deliberately proceeds to carry on at a higher level.

"How far, O rich, do you extend your senseless avarice? Do you intend to be the sole inhabitants of the earth? Why do you drive out the fellow sharers of nature and claim it all for yourselves? The earth was made for all, rich and poor, in common."—Pope St. Ambrose (A.D. 340-397).

MR. DALTON'S HALTING STATEMENT

In the Second Reading debate on the Finance Bill, May 19th, the question of the Rating of Land Values was raised by Mr. H. G. McGhee and Mr. R. R. Stokes, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer made a reply.

Mr. H. G. McGhee (Labour, Penistone): Last year, the Chancellor of the Exchequer referred to the possibility of rating land values or introducing a tax on land values, and promised that he would consider the suggestion. . . . Many local authorities, since he made that statement, have asked for powers to enable them to rate land values. . . . The policy on this issue has been clearly stated for many years past. In 1936 we came down definitely for a policy of a rating of land values, and we made it clear to the country that we would implement our promise. I hope that the Chancellor will add to the scheme of block grants which he announced in his speech at Bishop Auckland yesterday, his intention to carry the policy of relieving the local authorities further in this direction. . . . I suggest that by enabling local authorities to adopt land value rating would be a lever to drive owners of undeveloped land and delapidated property to redevelop. It would ease the burden of rates for private enterprise shopkeepers and the great masses of the people in this country who are living in highly rented and rated homes. I ask the Chancellor for a clear and straightforward declaration, and a specific pledge that in the coming Session we are to have some effort made to enable authorities to collect this revenue which lies ripe in their hands.

Mr. R. R. Stokes (Labour, Ipswich): . . . I ask the Chancellor why he does not consider introducing a comprehensive levy on site values for central revenue purposes. He is constantly in need of new revenue, and I cannot understand why he does not emulate the good example of Lord Snowden who actually got a Measure on to the Statute Book. That Measure, owing to the scurrilous attitude of the Tories opposite, was removed, and we have nothing like it to-day. . . . The Chancellor himself said he had not got the staff. I would remind the House that in the Town and Country Planning Bill it is contemplated spending £1 million a year for five years on staff to make what I consider to be a completely bogus valuation. When they have done that, what are they going to do? Are they going to collect revenue? They are going to pay out £300 million—not get it in.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Dalton): . . . Several of my hon. Friends have referred again to the rating of land values. I made the Government position quite clear on that subject a year ago. There will be legislation some time. We cannot tell exactly when, but within the life of this historic and vital Parliament, it is probable that legislation will be brought in dealing with various matters relevant to valuation, rating, and kindred topics. There will naturally be a place for discussion of the topics raised by my two hon. Friends, but this is primarily a responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Health. It would be proper I think if my right hon. Friends entered into discussions with me on this matter. I would be most responsive, most interested. I cannot say in advance, what line he will take, but on the broad picture painted last year such a proposal might fit into the general pattern of a report on the rating system. It cannot belong to the Finance Bill because we are not going to embark at this stage on a national valuation for national taxation on land values. But it does not exclude the possibility of such local authorities as wish to do so, considering matters in relation to land values within their areas. I cannot go further than that, but I hope that what I have said will not be thought discouraging.

[The Chancellor displays great skill as a spinner of words. He merely repeats the obscurity in which he has previously shrouded this matter. No legislation is promised nor are the intentions of the Government in any way indicated. With his multitude of ambiguities and reservations, Mr. Dalton allows himself—and the Government—plenty of escape from making any pledges at all. Some time, and perhaps, all depending on what it may be possible to fit into other schemes yet to be evolved, it is probable—but why go on? A not discouraging statement? It is better characterised as a masterpiece of prevarication.]