

POPULATION ON THE MOVE

NORMALLY, WHENEVER the population of an area increases, or when the community becomes more prosperous, there land values rise; conversely, where the population declines, or, remaining stationary, the people suffer adversity and become poorer, land values decline.

To-day, because of the war, there has been a great redistribution of the population. Because of enemy bombing, thousands have been evacuated from some districts, while some "safe" areas are filled to overcrowding.

What has been the result?

Where there has been a great influx of people to a town or village, there has been an almost immediate rise in land value, although it shows itself on the surface in quite another guise, and is recognized as such by few.

Hotels, boarding-houses and lodgings are full up, restaurants, shops and places of amusement are well patronized, trade improves, there is a greater demand for labour, wages tend to rise, and there is greater prosperity all round. The prices charged for rooms and service rise so much that there are frequent complaints of "profiteering."

On the other hand, in a seaside town in a prohibited area, or anywhere from which an appreciable proportion of the population has migrated, the case is very different. Here we find most of the hotels and boarding-houses closed, while the few which remain open, hoping to be able to weather the storm, are glad to accept almost any prices they can get from the few guests they are lucky enough to obtain. Half the shopkeepers are compelled to put up their shutters, trade stagnates, the demand for labour falls off, and those who can, leave the place to seek their livelihood elsewhere.

Previous to the changes brought about by the war, both communities had accommodated themselves to the prevailing land values, or, to put it the other way round, the land values had adjusted themselves to the condition of the people living in them.

But where the population has increased, and land values have risen, those who are in a position to serve the public get the immediate benefit of at least part of this rise. Hence their unaccustomed prosperity.

If, however, these conditions were to persist, the land value would gravitate to where it must inevitably go in the end—to the owners of the land—and express itself in higher ground rent. Then the original inhabitants would be, could be, no better off than they were before.

The depopulated area, like the other, has been adjusted to a certain level of land value—the land values were in accordance with the prevailing conditions of trade and population before the decline of both.

Now the land values have fallen as quickly in this case as they rose in the other, but all the charges fixed in accordance with a high land value remain to be met by those left behind, and the painful process of readjustment has to be gone through.

Local rates, being levied on occupied property, and not on the sites, cannot be collected from empty premises, but the municipal authorities, despite the depleted population, still require the same money to carry on the necessary public services. Therefore the rates go up. These, an onerous burden in normal times, now become insupportable to many who are summoned, but still cannot pay; and those who do manage to do so, do so at great sacrifice—and rents, based on a high land value, still go on, until leases run out, or bankruptcies or evictions take place.

Eventually, of course, things would right themselves, but only when, after suffering and financial distress, an

equilibrium had been reached by ground rent falling in accordance with the lessened land value.

It is unfortunate that there is no immediate remedy for this. The trouble is due to the present system under which land value is not returned, in the form of public services, to the general public, to whom it is due, but is allowed instead to be appropriated by those individual proprietors who legally claim the land on which all must live and work. The people are rated on the houses, shops and other buildings which they cannot do without—and the better these are, the more heavily they are rated.

The remedy lies, when the war is over, in abolishing this system of legalized robbery, and substituting for it one which takes for the people what is theirs—the land value. Then the rates, being based on site value, and not on the buildings, would be no longer a burden, and whether rents were high or low would make no difference to the prosperity of the people.

If we are to have a better Britain after the war than the one we are now fighting for, this will have to be done.

D. C.

"ENGLISH SAGA"

"On an execution morning at Newgate one saw the rough old London of the landless squatter . . . gathered outside the gaol . . . For countrymen deprived of their land and status soon degenerated . . ."

"The real rulers of England were still the greater squires. In the course of a century and a half of monopoly and splendid, unblushing corruption, they had, inch by inch, pared the powers both of the Crown and of the smaller squirearchy. In the latter eighteenth century, in their hunger for ever more land, they had even destroyed the English peasantry . . ."

"One sees them in the tell-tale pages of Mr Creevey; with their rentals multiplied out of all measure by improved agriculture and urban expansion (those of the Shakerleys, a typical North Country family, increased tenfold between 1760 and 1830), but already divorced by their staggering wealth from that close contact with reality and their humbler fellow citizens which had enabled their forebears to obtain power."—Quoted from ENGLISH SAGA, 1840-1940, by Arthur Bryant, reviewed in *The Queen*, 1st January, 1941.

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