

## NORTHERN IRELAND

THE Belfast Improvement Committee (*Belfast News-Letter*, 11th June) has decided to ask the Ministry of Home Affairs whether the Government would sanction a scheme whereby the city could secure the sites of buildings demolished in the air raids for post-war development. It was suggested that the Corporation might purchase such sites. Alternatively, the Government might finance a scheme. Many of the sites would be invaluable when the time came for post-war reconstruction, and the Committee were approaching the question with an eye to future developments. They wanted to know whether they could buy ground at its present valuation. Some of the ground rents bore no relation to the importance of the site, and they therefore had decided to ask the views of the Government.

On 14th June the *News-Letter* published the following letter from Mr Andrew J. Lutton of Larne:

"In your issue of 11th inst. your political correspondent mentions a proposal, now under consideration by the City Council, to take over sites in the bombed areas for town planning. The question arises—where is the money to come from to finance it? If the so-called owners have made these sites in their workshops and set them down there, it is just and right that they should be paid the market value for all they have done, but if that idea is absurd is it not also absurd that the community should be compelled to pay for what they themselves have created? It has been at their expense that streets have been made and water, light, and sewers, etc., provided, and it is these things and the presence and activity of the people in the vicinity that give value to the ground, and not anything that the holders of title deeds have done. True, the law sanctions the existing custom, but when State law and moral law conflict the former should be altered so as to secure to the community the value in question. In Great Britain over 240 local councils have petitioned Parliament for leave to make this change."

One of the Northern Ireland town councils that has taken action on the rating of land values is Ballymena. In March, 1940, all members of the Council were supplied with explanatory literature at the request of the Town Clerk, and in April, 1940, the Finance Committee decided to refer the matter to the General Council of Municipal Authorities for Northern Ireland. Encouraged by the interest taken in Ballymena, the Town Clerk of Donaghadee asked for and received a similar set of literature, but apparently no further action has yet been taken.

But in Belfast, the Improvement Committee should ascertain what progress the General Purposes Committee has made in the consideration it was giving (as reported in the *News-Letter* and other Belfast papers of 21st March, 1939) to a circular from the Association of Municipal Corporations which suggested that "the existing system of rating should be altered so that local authorities be empowered to levy rates upon owners in respect of the value of land, apart from improvements, for the purpose of effecting a reduction in or abolition of local rates payable at present by the occupiers of rateable property; securing that the public shall benefit from the land values which arise from the presence and activities of the community; and facilitating the acquisition of land, the provision of houses and the making of public improvements."

Alderman Harry Midgeley gave a lead in a letter he wrote at the same time to the Town Clerk in the course of which he said: "I think the Government should be urged to introduce a Municipal Enabling Act empowering local authorities to impose a rate to be levied on land values . . . The purpose of the land values rate would be to give relief to local ratepayers and income-tax payers, and to ease the burden of improving and developing municipal amenities. Under such a scheme it might eventually be possible to levy most of the rates on land values."

At the special conference of the Northern Ireland Labour Party (Alderman H. Midgeley in the chair), held on 7th August, 1937 a resolution was adopted urging the taxation of land values. Alderman Midgeley saying that if the principle of the resolution had been applied 25 years ago local authorities could have been living rate-free to-day;

and Mr R. Dorman characterized the resolution as the most important one before the conference.

More has been done in Eire to promote this Municipal demand. The Association of Irish Municipal Authorities, the Irish Leaseholders Association, and the Dublin Citizen's Housing Council, have all declared in favour of the principle of land value rating. The Association of Municipal Authorities discussed it fully at their annual conference, in September, 1937, which Mr F. C. R. Douglas, L.C.C., attended by special invitation, reading a paper afterwards printed and widely circulated. At the Conference in September, 1938, a resolution declaring for land value rating was adopted. Preceding the Conference all its members had been supplied, at the instance of Mr Sean MacCathmhaoil, the secretary of the Association, with three publications of the United Committee. The matter was again discussed at the Association's Annual Conference in September, 1940, when a further paper was presented by Mr F. C. R. Douglas; and in preparation for that Conference the United Committee, helped by the lists given by the Association, sent literature on the Rating of Land Values to all the town clerks in Eire in quantity sufficient (1,190 copies of each pamphlet) to distribute through them to every Town Council member in the land. It was a piece of educational work effectively done, and if a similar campaign could be organized throughout Northern Ireland, the United Committee would no doubt eagerly co-operate.

## THE HOLD-UP IN THE WEST

To the Editor, "*Land & Liberty*."

SIR,—Your article in the March issue—"Land Speculation"—induces me to send the following statement as to local conditions. Cornwall is one of the most sparsely populated counties, having about two and a half acres area for every man, woman and child in it; Newquay is one of the most popular health and holiday resorts in the country; the only possible area for expansion and development is towards the east of the town where the chief landowner is the *Public Body* called the "Duchy of Cornwall." For many generations this land has been let and farmed, the rent having been about 25s. an acre including buildings, so that its real value in 1930 was about £35 an acre. The demand for houses led to the development of this land in 1931: roads, sewers, public services, etc., were made and installed, and the sites were pegged out and sold at the rate of £1,280 an acre. About one-third is built upon and two-thirds is lying idle, not a penny being paid to the local finances. After deducting cost of above-named services the net profit made by the Duchy is £900 an acre or about 2575 per cent (net) over 1930 value. Here is a simple sum of "Rule of Three." If a grocer be fined £6 for charging one farthing too much for an item of *inessential* food, what should be the punishment inflicted on the Duchy for such profiteering on a *monopoly*?

Yours, etc.,

NEWQUAY, CORNWALL.

S. J. LEE VINCENT.

*The Menace of Land Monopoly* is a new pamphlet (price 2d.) published by the Henry George Foundation, Australia. With portrait of Mr Winston Churchill on its front page, the pamphlet reprints extracts from Mr Churchill's speeches in the House of Commons on 4th May, 1909, and at the King's Theatre, Edinburgh, on 17th July, 1909. Extracts of the Edinburgh speech come to us also as published in the New Zealand *Matamata County Mail* and in the Canadian *Square Deal*. A chapter in our new book, *Why the German Republic Fell* (2s. 6d.) gives passages from several of Mr Churchill's speeches on the Taxation of Land Values.

An example of the difference between the real value of land and the value at which it is assessed (because of its present use) is afforded in the case cited by Mr R. R. Stokes at question time in the House of Commons on 15th May. Two cottages with three acres of land at Cranleigh, Surrey, are advertised for sale at £2,000. The local rates on the cottages and the land are £3 a year. It is an example of the absurdity and anomaly of the present rating system.