

RURAL ENGLAND AND "RECONSTRUCTION"

A GREAT OPPORTUNITY

By
C. ROTHWELL

Published by
The United Committee for the Taxation of Land
Values, 11, Tothill Street, London, S.W.1.

Price One Penny.

4-783

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

	PAGE
Reconstruction	3
Rural England	4
A Great Opportunity	5
The One Thing Needful—Overthrow Land Monopoly	7
The Remedy	7
Unused Land	8

Copies of this Pamphlet can be had at 5s. per 100.

Apply to the

**UNITED COMMITTEE FOR THE
TAXATION OF LAND VALUES**

11 Tothill Street. London, S.W.1.

Telegrams : EULAV, VIC, LONDON

Telephone : VICTORIA 7323

List of Books and Pamphlets on the Land Question
and specimen copy of

“Land & Liberty”

2d. monthly. 3s. a year (*post free*)

sent free on request.

RURAL ENGLAND AND "RECONSTRUCTION"

A GREAT OPPORTUNITY

The world is now faced with the stupendous tasks of reconstruction.

Here, in England, unlike our former European allies and enemies, we stand neither amidst the charred and shattered ruins of towns and villages, nor in the seething flood of revolution that has engulfed dynasties and state systems. But we are faced with our own tasks of reconstruction, entailed not only by the transition from war to peace, but in large part inspired by the desire to establish a more just social and industrial order, and by the knowledge that our armies would return to their homeland, to their native town or village with a quickened sense of what "home" should be and might be.

At last, society as a whole is permeated by a sense of the iniquity of the existing social order: its vast resources—its vast mass of misery; its gross injustice, its wealth of opportunities for some, its denial to millions of the means to a full life.

Reconstruction Committees for various purposes have been at work. But one Reconstruction Committee is missing—the one that should have been set up first has never been appointed, namely, a Committee for the reconstruction of our system of Land Tenure and Taxation.

To make the land really accessible, to put used and unused land to the most productive use, this is the project that should be at the head of our reconstruction programme.

It should be done as an act of national economy, no less than as an act of justice to the nation as a whole. This great question will have to be faced, and quickly. Looked at from a national point of view as distinct from sectional and individual interests, the present order of things in relation to the land, whether urban or rural, is indefensible.

The greater part of the land of this country is owned by comparatively a few persons, whilst the vast majority are landless.*

Here, surely, should be laid the foundations of all our reconstruction schemes, and the reconstruction must be radical. All the schemes will be vain if they are out of scale; if they are tinkering repairs to the structure when the foundations have crumbled, schemes for pulling up a few weeds when the whole field needs ploughing up. For what is needed in conceiving these schemes is the recognition that out of the destruction and chaos of the war there is arising a new civilisation. The civilisation of 1914 belongs already to an old world; it has passed as surely as the Sedan chair and the stage coach.

Rural England

The Enclosure Acts from 1760 to 1840 crippled English village life. To-day our cities and towns are overcrowded, while village communities remain stationary or have decayed. Large tracts of land are given up to game covers, whilst crowds of country-bred men and women live in wretched conditions in the overcrowded areas of our towns, where they swell the ranks of the unemployed. There are wide tracts of enclosed and unused land where there should be thriving village communities.

What would the repopulating of the countryside—as the result of putting this unused land under cultivation—bring to the nation? It would enormously increase production; it would provide the means of livelihood for great numbers; it would improve the national physique—the enormous number of “Grade 3” men is a bitter commentary on the wide tracts of thinly-peopled or deserted countryside; it would improve the economic position of the workers in town and country; it would stimulate the sense of freedom; it would quicken the sense of beauty in the people; it would produce a population that would bring a valuable

* 1,700 persons hold 14,000,000 acres in England and Wales.

element into political and social life. And it would afford an opportunity to the increasing number who long for the rural life, but for whom that life is impracticable under existing conditions.

Rural England has had but a small share in the fruits of the material progress of the last century. The conditions of village life are still primitive compared with those of the towns. Village homes, generally, are miserably small. Charming as they commonly are as seen from the road, with, it may be, old red brick walls and red roof-tiles toned by age, roses or honeysuckle growing round the doorway, roses climbing over the tiny bedroom window, many of them within are miserable hovels, in which decency and comfort are scarcely possible. It is not an uncommon thing to find in one small room the father having a meal, the mother at the wash-tub and the children playing, or working at their lessons. And there is the same lack of space for sleeping, children of both sexes and the parents being crowded into a couple of rooms. Poverty permeates the lives of the villagers—poverty in the material equipment of their homes, poverty in their social conditions. The village communities are too small to provide the fellowships that exist in the towns; for them there are none of the societies that have become general in the towns—choral, orchestral, literary, scientific and other societies; rarely can they boast a club, other than the gathering at the village inn; they have no theatre, no cinema, and the collection of books and periodicals at the occasional village institute is an inadequate substitute for a library.

All this must be changed—it can be changed. Workers on the land must have their status and their prospects improved, their social needs must be supplied, and (one of the factors that will promote these changes) their numbers must be increased.

A Great Opportunity

To-day we are faced with a challenging opportunity of founding a new rural social order.

First—there will be large numbers of our soldiers eager to work on the land, who will refuse to return to the factory, the foundry, the shop or the office. And there should be no difficulty in training very many of these men for agricultural work. To these must be added a considerable number of

the war-time allotment holders, many of whom have found a keen pleasure in agriculture and have gained sufficient experience to fit them to start regular work on the land; and also a not inconsiderable number of women who will want to take up market-gardening or poultry-farming. Here, then, is the first essential factor for the colonizing of the country.

Second—as a result of the work of a Reconstruction Committee appointed to deal with the question of the electric power supply in Great Britain, the Government is considering a scheme for the reorganization and extension of the supply of electric current over the entire country; and in the near future there should scarcely be a village or hamlet that will not have electric power and light available. This factor alone is of immeasurable importance to the development of rural life. It opens up prospects that have hitherto been conceived of only by those who have been regarded as dreamers. It will mean much to the domestic life of the villages, but it will have great and far-reaching economic consequences. It will make possible small-scale industry, because it will give it an efficiency in production that, without it, is under modern conditions impossible. It will facilitate co-operative organisation in agriculture, of which the excellent results are to be seen on the Continent (especially in Denmark) and also in Ireland. It should tend to the development of home industry, for which there should be a place in the economic structure of the future.

Third—another factor is that of transport. Road transport has been greatly developed during the war, and obviously will play a great part in the future. It is certain, too, that our railway and canal systems will be improved; and whatever may be decided as to the future ownership of the railways and canals, the people will insist that they shall be developed and worked to meet the national requirements. Improved transport will remove the isolation of many of our agricultural districts, it will reduce the costs of production, it will make possible the profitable disposal of produce that frequently has to be wasted.

MEN, MOTIVE POWER AND TRANSPORT: these are the factors that have completely changed the conditions of rural reform. It is not mere rhetoric, but simply a plain statement of fact, to say that here are the conditions for founding in the immediate future a new rural social order.

The One Thing Needful—Overthrow Land Monopoly

But the fundamental thing is lacking. One great obstacle remains, the obstacle of land monopoly ; great areas of land are withheld from cultivation, and much of what is available is only available on terms that are prohibitive to the smallholder ; and it is the smallholder who must be the main element in the new organisation of rural society. This obstacle must be removed. The land must be made accessible—and it can be done.

The Remedy

Large areas of land at present withheld from cultivation could be made available. This could be effected by the instruments of taxation and rating. If the value of all land, *whether used or unused*, were taxed and rated, land would be speedily released on a large scale. But, of course, the real value of the land would have to be assessed to taxes and rates, not the trifling, almost nominal value at which a large part of the land of this country is now assessed, but a value somewhere between this (at which the owner asks that it shall be assessed for rates and taxes), and that other value that is claimed for it when it is wanted for, say, a housing scheme or a municipal water supply. The valuation for taxation and for selling purposes should be identical.

This taxation and rating of land values ought to be accompanied by the elimination of the value of buildings and improvements from the assessment. This should be done in justice to those in possession of the land, for a land value tax ought to fall on the value created by the community, and not on the value created by the application of labour and capital to the land in the shape of buildings or improved cultivation or other improvements.*

The existing system includes both the land and the building on it in *one assessment* ; consequently any addition or improvement (e.g., the erection of an additional barn or glass-house, or the substitution of a better type of building) raises the assessment ; and the failure to improve or to add to the building on a site either keeps the assessment low, or renders it void owing to the premises becoming from one cause or another unoccupied. Thus, development and improvement instead of being encouraged are penalised,

* The proposal to *rate* site values, as distinct from buildings and improvements, has received widespread support from members of all parties.

with disastrous social and economic consequences alike in urban and in rural areas.*

Unused Land

Land is withheld from use in some cases in order that a higher price may be obtained for it ; in other cases because the owner prefers to keep it as cover for game, or because he does not want smallholders on his estate, or for some other personal reason. And while the value of *unused* land is practically tax-free and rate-free, its owners can afford to withhold it. When it is realized that land is unlike the commodities of trade, in that its quantity cannot be increased, and that in any given situation there is no alternative supply, it becomes evident that the landowner under the existing system has the community at a disadvantage. This position of the landowner has been mainly responsible for the breakdown of the Small Holdings Act, it has increased the cost of vital public services, and it is one of the chief causes of our housing problem.

Thus, as a result of land being almost tax-free except when the owner permits it to be used, *the nation is taxed* in the hindrance to production and in the shape of the inflated cost of many of its public services ; and it pays the penalty of this preposterous state of things in the aggravation of social, industrial and economic problems.

To tax and rate the value of *unused* land would be an equitable and effective method of bringing it into use.

* Of this system Mr. Lloyd George has said : " The worst of the present system is that the moment a man neglects his property he escapes rates ; the moment a man begins to improve his property he is fined as a ratepayer. A shopkeeper extends his premises. A great workshop is erected. The rate assessor comes down and says, ' Information has been laid against you, sir, that you have extended your works, that you are providing more employment for hundreds of workmen. Are you guilty or not guilty ? ' He says, ' I cannot deny it. ' Then he says, ' I fine you £50 or £100 a year as long as you live, and don't do it again, ' and he goes on to a moorland near Leeds—not a building in sight, nor a plough on the land, no sign of one. Then he says, ' This is all right, no improvements here, ' and he meets the proprietor and says, ' What are you doing with this land ? ' The proprietor says, ' Ha, I am holding it up until Leeds people want water ; then I am going to charge them 800 years' purchase for disturbing my pheasants. ' The rate collector takes him by the hand and says, ' It is such men as you who make the greatness of our country. We will only put you down 12s. an acre. We have got to put something down. ' YOU THINK I AM CARICATURING. THAT IS THE RATING SYSTEM OF ENGLAND."—(Mr. Lloyd George at Middlesbrough, November 8th, 1913.)

Obviously to withhold land would then be costly, and this *costliness would increase if the value of the land owing to the demand for it increased.* For example, in relation to rural land, *the fact that a piece of land was wanted for small holdings* would be a measure of its value, to be taken into account in fixing the assessable value upon which the owner would be required to pay rates and taxes.

To tax and rate all land values and to take off the rates and tax from buildings and improvements, would make land accessible for use, would prevent the inflation of the price of land, would remove the burden that presses heavily upon those who develop and improve their land, and would tend to give tenants greater security of tenure. It should be the first step in "reconstruction," for it is the condition precedent to other reconstruction plans, if, in carrying them forward, the nation is not to be obstructed by the caprice or plundered by the greed of landowners. Already landowners are reaping a harvest, taking the first fruits out of the hands of the farmers, from the Corn Production Act of 1917 (by which the State, to encourage wheat-growing, guaranteed the price of wheat), for the price of agricultural land is soaring up. And under the existing system they will take toll from "reconstruction." For "reconstruction" will have in relation to land a two-fold effect: it will increase the demand for it and, by the increased facilities for industry that it will produce, for example, by improved transport and by the extension to hitherto unsupplied districts of a cheap supply of electric current, it will increase the price of land.

Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Bonar Law have told the nation that, "Increased production must necessarily be the basis of all schemes for the improvement of the conditions of the people. . . . It has been demonstrated that the land of the country, if properly cultivated and used, could have yielded food and other products of the soil to a much larger extent." No one in these days is likely to dispute the truth of these words, and, although they are not the fundamental justification for the Taxation and Rating of Land Values, they furnish a very strong support for the proposal.

The case for this reform rests on its essential justice; and it is claimed for it that it would be a sound economic measure in relation to the entire land of the country, whether urban or rural. But it is not proposed to elaborate this pamphlet into a discussion of the principle of land values taxation. The proposal has survived the most active opposition

over a long period of years, and is gaining increasing acceptance. It is to-day in England a part of the programme of two of the three political parties in the State. Further, the taxation and rating of land values is not an untried policy; it has been in actual operation for a number of years in Australia and New Zealand.

This proposal, no doubt, will be described by its opponents as a revolutionary proposal. It is a revolutionary proposal. But we had better look out with open eyes. Revolution is marching. What hangs in the balance is not whether we shall or shall not have revolutionary changes, but whether we can agree quickly as to the means by which they shall be wrought. Titanic forces are surging across the world; we cannot escape them, but we may hope to direct them. And this proposal for giving access to the land is revolutionary only in the magnitude of the changes it would produce. It would radically alter the structure of rural society: it would emancipate the rural worker; it would hasten the end of the existing order, under which the greater part of rural England is still reserved for the maintenance of a privileged social caste, and which allows agriculture to be restricted and hampered for the sake of sport. But it would not produce disorder, it would not disorganize the machinery of the State.

As to our landed class, it is certain that it will not be permitted to retain its privileged position—a position that for many generations past has entailed no corresponding obligations. It has held privileges for which the nation has had to pay heavily. It cannot be suffered to stand in the way of a great and urgently needed national reform.

It should be remembered that the heaviest blow to rural England was inflicted by the Enclosure Acts. In the worst period of this raiding of the common lands of the people by the all-powerful landowners, nearly two million acres were appropriated, and from time to time portions of these lands have had to be purchased at preposterous prices for public services.

There will be other proposals for dealing with the question of agricultural reform. But we ought now to insist on beginning at the foundations. It is time we had an end to paternal schemes for patching up this or that evil, schemes that are economically unsound and are made to appear successful by support from public funds or by the granting of special privileges.

In the early days of recruiting for the war, a poster was issued showing a soldier pointing to a picture of the countryside, and beneath this, the question—

"IS IT WORTH FIGHTING FOR?"

And now the men who left their homes for the war are returning to their native town or village; many of them have endured grim and terrible experiences, have been "over the top" and faced the supreme risk. The un-intended but obvious suggestion of the recruiting poster should now be acted upon.

But it is not for them alone that access to the land is needed, nor is their splendid service the fundamental ground of their right to access to the land, for they share that right with their fellows; its foundation is justice. The land is claimed for nothing less than the founding of a new rural social order; and conditions have conspired to create the opportunity.

In the near future, if the opportunity is seized, poverty may be banished from our villages, enormous supplies of home-grown produce will be flowing into the towns, and village communities, no longer shrunken, isolated and poverty-stricken, will be developing, probably on co-operative lines, a vigorous community life. And there will be rising a generation of children, well nurtured, the children of men and women freed from social and economic fetters, the children, too, of the woods and lanes and fields, of the sunlit and wind-swept countryside.

"Land & Liberty" series of New Pamphlets

One Penny each. Trade Terms : 5s. per 100.

1. HOUSE FAMINE AND THE LAND BLOCKADE.
By A. W. Madsen, B.Sc.
2. THE MASTER PROBLEM. By J. Dundas
White, LL.D.
3. THE MEANING OF TITLE TO LAND. By J.
Dundas White, LL.D.
4. THE CASE FOR LAND VALUE RATING. By
J. Dundas White, LL.D.
5. COMPLETE PRICE-LIST OF SIXTY BOOKS AND
PAMPHLETS ON THE LAND QUESTION. Free.
6. NATURAL RIGHTS. By A. G. Huie.
7. JUSTICE THE OBJECT—TAXATION THE MEANS.
By Henry George.
8. A BUSINESS MAN'S QUESTION. By W. R.
Lester, M.A.
9. MORE JOBS THAN MEN.
10. LAND IN RELATION TO THE INDUSTRIAL
SITUATION. By Chas. H. Smithson.
11. THE LABOUR QUESTION. By Henry George.
12. WHY A LIBERAL JOINED THE I.L.P.
13. RURAL ENGLAND AND "RECONSTRUCTION."
By C. Rothwell.
14. HOW MODERN CIVILISATION MAY DECLINE.
By Henry George.

Sat of Fourteen Pamphlets, as above, for 6d., post free.

For Books and Pamphlets on the Land
Question and Free Specimen Copy of
"LAND & LIBERTY"

2d. monthly, 3s. a year (post free),

Apply to

**The United Committee for the Taxation of
Land Values, 11, Tothill St., London, S.W.1.**