

EDITORIAL NOTES

The Nationalization of the Mines.

Amid the complexity of the dispute between the mine-owners and the miners it is well to remember that the miners are making nothing more than a simple demand for sufficiency and security. We are told that there is a world glut of coal, that more coal is being produced than the demand justifies, and that there are more men in the mines than the mines can support. Hence the deadlock: the mines, it is said, cannot give the sufficiency and security that the miners demand.

The nationalization of the mines, that is to say, making them the property of the State to be administered by State officials, is being put forward as a possible remedy, and it will no doubt be one of the chief issues at the next General Election. The most enthusiastic advocates of diffused ownership and private property for all and the stoutest opponents of a Collectivist State will not deny the right of the State to own some national property. The State must possess the means of defence—all the property implied in its duty of maintaining order within its borders and securing itself from aggression from without. No one but an anarchist would dispute this.

But there are other kinds of property which are best owned by the State. The Postal services, the supply of water, gas and electricity, and the tramways, are perhaps best administered in public rather than private hands. The highways, the waterways, territorial seawaters and certain forest lands are best in the hands of the State in order to check monopoly and the undue advantage that private persons might have if they possessed them. It has been urged—and the argument will be more insistently pressed in view of the present coal dispute—that the mines, and perhaps the rail-

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ways, should be handed over to State control. Various proposals are put forward from different quarters for the detailed working out of such a scheme, and it may be questioned whether the nationalizing of the mines would prove the unmixed boon that is sometimes imagined. The mere conversion of coal shares into Government Bonds, in the present alleged bankrupt state of the mines, would be equivalent to a perpetual subsidy of the coal industry and the acceptance of a heavy burden by the taxpayer. For it is unlikely that Government control would make more out of the mines than is made by what is called private enterprise. The capitalist would have a State guarantee for his dividends: and would the miner be any better off? At best, would not the nationalization of the mines be only the same state of things called by a different name?

On this matter of nationalization we would recall the following paragraphs which appeared in these pages more than six years ago (*BLACKFRIARS*, May, 1920):

‘No matter what avenue you take towards your promised land through Nationalization, however broad and direct it may at first appear, it leads you at last, if the policy be pursued upon a general scale, to the Servile State: that is to a stable, permanently established society in which the Capitalist class more strictly defined, more solidly confirmed, shall remain the beneficiaries of national production, and the Proletariat shall be sharply differentiated from them, guaranteed security and sufficiency, but also compelled by a whole new national machinery to labour for the benefit of others. That national machinery is already in existence. Its foundations were securely laid in the great Capitalist Insurance Act. Its workings develop and increase very strongly every day. The new Ministry of Health will register and tabulate the Proletariat in the schools. The Labour Exchanges will further organize and tabulate the whole body of workers who will be caught in a net from which they will have no escape.

‘The Parliamentary system and the professional politicians have eagerly lent themselves to this development, for they are

inextricably bound up with Capitalism, of which many of them are themselves the beneficiaries and the others the servants. It is the great Capitalist who directly bribes and maintains, makes or breaks, the professional politician, and Parliament is his servant. His newspapers, his gift of shares, his 'pressure'—as it is euphemistically called—which he can bring to bear everywhere upon public life, is the master of the situation.

'The true issue from Capitalism is the wider and yet wider distribution of private property. It connotes State action and State control and State endowment. These things are complementary to and necessary to a stable distribution of ownership. But they are healthy only if their object is the maintenance of such a distribution.

'That distribution of property, the sane and only possible solution alternative to the Servile State, will be adopted here in Britain is unlikely indeed. It requires at the back of it a religion, and the religion is lacking. It requires a national mood protecting the small man against the great, favouring the family, conservative of what is normal to human society.

'And that mood is not to be discovered save as a product of the Catholic Church.'

The Roman Catholic Relief Bill.

The Strike has delayed the passage through Parliament of the Bill that is framed to remove certain remaining Catholic disabilities. A memorial is being presented to the Prime Minister from one hundred and eighty members of the House of Commons asking the Government to find time for passing the further stages of the Bill. In a letter to *The Times* (June 18th) Lord FitzAlan urges 'that facilities will be given for passing this Bill, which in one form or another has several times obtained a second reading.'

'The present Bill,' says Lord FitzAlan, 'has come down from Committee with no substantial amendments other than one providing it shall not extend to Northern Ireland.

'If passed, the Bill will repeal a number of sections of previous Acts which are generally regarded as obsolete, but are still invoked from time to time to the

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prejudice of Catholics. It may not be generally known, but it is a fact, that the exemption from income-tax granted by the Finance Act, 1921, to all charities without distinction has been refused in cases of Catholic charities on the strength of these unrepealed Acts. In the same way Catholic institutions have been called upon to pay duties in cases where no duties would be payable by non-Catholic institutions, and charitable gifts to Catholic foundations have been set aside as void. There are, besides, a number of disabilities imposed upon Catholics in the way of holding property.

‘I would suggest the time has come when such discrimination should no longer continue.’

The last sentence will only be interpreted by Catholics in the sense that Lord Fitz-Alan intended. We shall not be in danger of believing that there ever was a time when Catholics were perhaps less loyal and trustworthy. The change that time has brought is a change that has taken place in England and in Englishmen generally and not in Catholics especially. It only means that prejudice and suspicion are largely disappearing: it does not mean that Catholics were once plotters and a source of danger to the State, who have now been transformed into law-abiding citizens. We are not going to admit that our martyrs who died as victims of more severe Catholic disabilities were mere political felons, even though they were done to death on that charge. Therefore we should like to see this plea for fair play for Catholics urged not because the time has come when such discrimination should no longer continue; but on the more solid ground that there never was a time when ordinary justice and equity should be denied to any person or group in the community.

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