

Agrarian Reform in Esthonia

a Means of Suppressing
the Racial Minority

by

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Experience has taught that a people or race cannot permanently survive as such in a country where it has no direct connection with the soil of the country, in other words: where it does not own a proportionate share of the ground and real estate. If that possession is lost, then the intimate relation of the race with the country is severed. It may, in such a case, be able to continue its existence for a few generations in the cities and towns, but it is no longer regarded as an integral part of the native population and, as a matter of fact, a race in such a predicament becomes itself estranged from the country; it loses its attachment to the native heath and the incentive to serve the country. But the sense of attachment to a definite country and love of the native home are of such primary importance in the make-up of a race that the latter must perish if it loses these instincts. The alternative in such a case can only be: either emigration, or absorption by another race.

It is a thing that can be observed anywhere in the world: wherever various races compete for supremacy in a country, that one will win out which manages to get control of the soil, be it by greater industry and thrift, be it by measures of violence.

In one case we can observe how one farm, one estate after another quite systematically passes into the possession of a certain race, and how this race, for that very reason, grows slowly, but steadily, in number and power, while the weaker rival race loses its direct connection with the soil, and subsequently becomes impoverished, emigrates, or gives up its distinctive nationality.

In another place we see a government take deliberate measures to protect the landed property of its own race or, at least, to restrict and reduce that of foreign races, realizing that the strength and vitality of a tribe depends on its direct connection with the soil.

In this manner, immeasurable areas of land have, in the course of history, passed from under the control of one race into that of another, with the result that the dividing lines between races were shifted, that whole races declined or perished altogether, while their more robust neighbors thrived and spread.

Exactly the same thing happens in the case of colonization or immigration. A race of immigrants can survive as such in its new home only if it acquires property of land and engages in the cultivation of the same. Otherwise it will be absorbed by the native population.

Hence the vitality of a people, the ability to preserve its distinctive racial character, is in the highest degree dependent on its direct connection with the soil. It is this, therefore, to which the greatest attention should be given whenever the protection of racial minorities is under consideration. Of what avail are the free use of its language and a general cultural autonomy to a people if it is deprived of the principal means by which it can safeguard its permanent existence in its home country? It will be doomed to perish even with those privileges.

If a racial minority is to be protected, care must above all be taken to preserve its direct connection with the soil and to prevent the majority from ousting it by compulsory measures from the possession of the land it holds. It ought to be left to natural development and free competition to decide whether a racial minority is able to preserve its direct connection with the soil over against the predominating race. If it does not possess the strength and vitality necessary to do so, it proves thereby that it has no claim to existence, and it will naturally dwindle down and become extinct. But even the most vigorous tribe can be forcibly annihilated by a numerical majority if compulsory measures are resorted to. That is what we call "doing violence to a racial minority" and what international protection of minorities should consider its task to prevent. —

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The racial make-up of a nation may vary in several general ways. Either the different tribes inhabit different territories within the boundaries of the country, separate from each other, or the minority is scattered all over the country. The latter type of distribution is usually found in territories where colonization has taken place, and in that case the social articulation is naturally identical with the racial. Those are exactly the conditions obtaining in the Baltic provinces of the former Russian Empire, in the present republics of Esthonia and Latvia. The Balto-Saxon minority, found here, immigrated more than 700 years ago and spread throughout the country. Owing to its cultural superiority, it formed a social upper class above the native population of Esthonians and Letts. It was not until later in the last century that the Esthonian and Lettish races evolved an educated class of their own.

Conditions like these could not but affect also the relation of the various races to the soil of the country: the great bulk of the landed property of the country was owned by the Balto-Saxons, while the peasant class was made up of the native population.

If the German immigrants succeeded in gaining a footing in the Baltic lands, if this minority managed to preserve its distinctive racial character through seven long centuries and succeeded in making their permanent homes in the country of their choice, then that was possible only because they became directly attached to the soil of the country by acquiring landed property. Without the latter, they would not be able to maintain their racial individuality except for a limited space of time. This is a fact which the majority races have recognized very clearly.

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Let us now direct our attention to the republic of Esthonia in particular.

We shall not examine into the causes underlying the strife and struggle of nationalities that has been kindled here. We Balts, while in power to do so, never made any attempt to denationalize the Esthonians, for we regard a peaceful companionship and cooperation of the two races not only as possible, but as desirable. But we are determined to take up the fight whenever our existence as a race is at stake, when we are to be made outcasts in our home land. On that point we are unanimous and firm.

Opinion among the Esthonians evidently differs. We readily believe that the bulk of the population is not hostile to us; we believe that they are, on the contrary, convinced by the experience of long years of the possibility and profitableness of cooperation among the two races; and we believe that they themselves realize and deplore the disastrous consequences of this racial strife which causes far more sacrifices and losses than can ever be made up for by any possible gains. But, as a matter of fact, the leaders of the Esthonian people are waging a relentless war against us and are doing whatever they can to deprive us of our landed property and of the possibility of further existence in the land of our birth. To prove the truth of this statement, is the purpose of the following lines.

It is but natural that the Esthonians should deny that there is such a campaign against the Balts. For Esthonia has been admitted to the League of Nations and is obliged to give international guaranties for the protection of her racial minorities. But this is pretty hard to do as long as an actual oppression of the minorities is going on. This oppression, however, has advanced to such a stage during the 3½ years of Esthonian rule and forms such an integral part of the policy of the state, that it is far simpler to deny these facts altogether than to make radical changes in the internal policy of the government.

It has been shown above how imperative it is for a race to be, and remain, directly connected with the soil of a country if it wants to survive in that country. It has also been pointed out that, as far as the Balts are concerned, this direct connection had been established through the ownership of large areas of land. It was this circumstance which made it comparatively easy for the Esthonians to undermine the foundations on which our existence is based, for it furnished them with a chance to destroy the landed property of the Balto-Saxons by means of an "Agrarian Reform" that would appear to the casual observer not as a political, but as a purely economic measure affecting the Balto-Saxons only incidentally.

But it is quite easy to detect the real motives underlying this reform if one will only examine the whole matter a little more closely. Let us mention here, in passing, that there was indeed a need of creating an additional number of peasant farms, that the German-Baltic party had recognized if and had submitted a suitable project, which would have accomplished the same purpose without doing as much harm to the Balts as is done by the Agrarian Law and the rules for its execution now in force.

However, it was not primarily this economic need which proved decisive in the matter; the government and the legislators were prompted (and are prompted now) by considerations of quite a different kind. That follows conclusively from the official speeches made in the Constituent Assembly.

The first reading of the Agrarian Law began on July 29, 1919. The first to speak was the prime minister O. Strandmann, setting forth the attitude of the government regarding the agrarian reform. He stated that the object of the agrarian reform was, above all, to destroy the existing "feudal system", and to accomplish this by abolition of all entailed estates. Putting the matter this way either betrays complete ignorance as to the real nature of the entailed estates, or it is a deli-

berate distortion of facts; for the entailed estates, mostly created in the 19th. century, are establishments of a purely private character and in no way connected with political privileges whatsoever.

Mr. Strandmann, touching briefly upon the shortage of farm lands and the emigration question, then continued:

"But also for political reasons we are forced, whether we want to or not, to do away with the system of large landed estates. If we think of the part which the owners of large landed estates have played in the life of our people, there is nothing else left for us to do: we must draw the logical conclusion that conditions like these must be terminated, and new ones created. It must not be possible for 500 inhabitants to control the entire country and nation. This power must be taken from them and turned over to the people. Only after they have been completely eliminated can the people hope for a better future, only then can it be said that they determine their own fate.

These, then, are the two general aims which must not be lost sight of in carrying out the agrarian reform. But there is another, very difficult, question to be settled: What are the best methods of expropriating the land? Should the system of large estates be retained, or should we adopt the system of small, individually owned farms?"

Mr. Strandmann then explained the reasons why he was of the opinion that a change to the small farms system would probably be more advantageous economically.

This shows plainly that the government was anxious, above all, to take the land from the former owners, the Balto-Saxons, and to put it into the hands of Esthonians; it further shows that it acted from purely political motives, believing that political power was dependent on the possession of large land holdings. The economic question whether the large estates had best be cut up into small peasant farms came in only for secondary consideration. So the real object of the agrarian reform is not so much the abolition of large landed estates as taking the possession of land out of the hands of the racial minority and putting it into those of the majority.

It is interesting to note that the present head of the Esthonian government, President Constantine Päts, took the same stand in his speech of March 17, 1922. He said that there had been a good deal of controversy on the question of agrarian reform, but that unfortunately none of the speakers had taken the point of view which he considered the right one. The possession of land, he claimed, was a political requisite necessity of the state, for no people was able to set up or maintain a state without land. (What the speaker had in mind here is, of course, not the self-evident fact that a state cannot exist without some territorial foundation, but the ownership of the land within the country, and the thesis was advanced by him in order to justify the agrarian reform in Esthonia.)

The proof of his assertion, he said, was to be found in history. The Balto-Saxons, when they ruled the country, had had control of the landed property; the Russians had tried to settle Russian peasants on the estates bought by their Agrarian Bank; and the German military authorities, in the period of German occupation, had demanded part of the land to settle their own men on it. In accordance with the same principle, the means of expropriation should be applied now that it was a question of creating an Esthonian state.

It is evident, then, that the head of the present Esthonian government interprets the agrarian reform exactly as we do: its object was to transfer the possession of land from the Baltic minority to the Esthonian majority.

The "Revaler Bote", a daily paper published in Reval, is perfectly right in saying with reference to the above official statements that the immigration of the Balto-Saxons never had the effect of undermining the position of the Esthonian people in their own land, and that none of the later colonizing projects had that purpose in view, while the Esthonian agrarian reform deliberately drives a whole race outright from house and home. "The upshot of the President's argument is that might goes before right. But to a much higher degree than the possession of land, is *right and lawfulness* a political requisite of the state and particularly for a country which can never have at its disposal very great means of physical coercion."

It is clear, then, that both, the government in office at the time of the agrarian legislation and the government in office now, are of the opinion that the Esthonian agrarian reform should above all aim at putting the landed property of the country into the hands of members of the Esthonian race and thus unroot the Baltic minority.

That such was also the intention of the legislators, i. e. the Constituent Assembly, becomes sufficiently clear from the speeches delivered by the majority parties.

We will cite here only one example, namely the address made on July 29, 1919 by deputy Weiler, who set forth the views of his party, the Labor Party. The latter party, conjointly with the Social Democrats who are very closely related to it, possessed at that time an absolute majority in the Constituent Assembly. It is this party which did not only elaborate, in the main, the agrarian law, but also controls its execution, inasmuch as the rather autocratic Ministry of Agriculture has uninterruptedly been, and still is, under its influence. The Labor Party is the intellectual originator and practical executor of the agrarian reform, hence its views are of decisive importance when it comes to ascertaining and appreciating the motives which led to that piece of legislation.

Mr. Weiler, in his address, dealt exclusively with the political aspect of the reform. With words of burning hatred he heaped the most sinister accusations upon the Baltic population, reviewing the entire history from the 13th. century down to the present, and repeating time and again his pathetic refrain "In order that such things may not happen again, we need this agrarian reform". Ceterum censeo

"In concluding I would direct your attention to a passage in a speech delivered on July 12, 1918, in Riga by the Secretary of the Livonian Corporation of Nobility, Alexander von Tobien. He said: 'Our estates are not only economically important, they are so also from a moral point of view, for they have been the backbone of the Baltic race in this country.' — Well, gentlemen, whenever you want to kill an animal, you break its backbone." (Roaring applause from the majority parties.)

The organ of the Labor Party, the "Waba Maa", sums up Mr. Weiler's speech as follows:

"By means of an objective address, in which every word and every assertion was founded on an ample array of facts, he succeeded

in convincing the Constituent Assembly that the agrarian question is primarily a political question intended to break the backbone of the Balto-Saxons in Esthonia, and that thoroughly."

Further comments on this point are needless.

But also the individual provisions of the Agrarian Law contain evidence that its purpose was not by any means merely the creation of small peasant farms which would be able to subsist. There are certain provisions which cannot be explained at all from an economic point of view. But if one traces them back to their origin and examines them in connection with the whole complexus of the agrarian reform, then they furnish additional evidence that the agrarian reform in Esthonia is meant to put an end to Balto-Saxon ownership of large estates.

The law contains, for example, the remarkable provision that a certain class of large and medium-sized estates — the so-called "Landstellen" — should be expropriated only in cases where the owners are at the same time proprietors of baronial estates.

What does that mean? Economically speaking, there is no difference between a baronial estate and a "landstelle". As a matter of fact, there are plenty of "landstellen" which surpass many baronial estates in point of area. The only difference between these two categories of real estate was this that in the former diets only the owners of baronial estates had a vote. But even this sole and purely political difference disappeared when Esthonia gained her independence. Viewed from an economic point of view, the difference of treatment meted out to the two categories is therefore inexplicable.

Evidently one special class of land-owners was to be spared the ruinous consequences of expropriation. A comparatively large fraction of the "landstellen" was owned by Esthonians, whereas the baronial estates were almost exclusively in Balto-Saxon hands. Any unbiased observer must see, then, that the intention was to accord the Esthonians more favorable treatment than the Balto-Saxons. The intention of this particular provision and the general tendency of the law becomes perfectly clear, however, when one considers that the same "landstellen" which, on principle, were to be inviolate must nevertheless be expropriated if they are owned by proprietors of baronial estates. This shows clearly enough that the law is directed against a special class of the population; for if any one owns a baronial estate, he will not only have to give up that, but all other landed property as well.

It almost looks as if the owner of a baronial estate as such is regarded as a noxious creature which ought to be exterminated. That is, of course, not the idea. What was to be destroyed was Balto-Saxon ownership of large tracts of land; for the majority of large estates, as stated before, was in Baltic hands.

The cited example shows conclusively that the legislators, i. e. the Esthonian majority, desired to deprive the Baltic minority of all landed property, as far as that was feasible, and in doing so they did not shrink from measures which were devoid even of the slightest semblance of justice and right. For it was blind hatred which actuated them and made them cast prudence to the winds.

Another peculiar feature of the law is the expropriation of forests. If the object of the agrarian law really was the transformation of the large land holdings into small peasant farms, as the Esthonians want to make the world believe, then we are confronted with another puzzle.

For the forests are by no means parcelled out together with the newly created lots of land — which would indeed be an absurd method of forestry — on the contrary, the new leaseholder is obliged to buy every log, every board from the state, for all the forests have been taken under state management. Even the most extreme apologists of the agrarian reform are forced by the experiences of the last few years to admit that this step has done great injury to national economics. In fact, it was to be expected right from the start that private management of the forests must be more profitable, economically, than public ownership, and this was pointed out more than once during the deliberations on the law. But in this case again, race hatred had its way: the Balts had to be robbed of as much of their property as possible, and the question whether that would be to the economic advantage of the country was not raised at all. And now the attempt is being made to let even this step appear as a purely economic measure.

We have so far set forth the reasons why we are of the opinion that the Agrarian Reform in Esthonia is intended to serve the purpose of injuring the racial minority. We have also mentioned that, for very natural reasons, the Esthonian press as well as the Esthonian statesmen deny that such purpose exists.

Now we will show, by means of two examples, that our view is fully shared by Esthonian authorities that are unbiased in their judgment, or politically imprudent and therefore sincere.

The first of these examples is found in a decision of the Supreme Court at Dorpat, the highest court of justice in Esthonia. The Minister of Justice had asked for its opinion on the question whether all the "landstelles" and other parcels of land belonging to former owners of baronial estates were to be expropriated. The Supreme Court answered in the affirmative and said in its motivation the following:

"This opinion (that the owner of a baronial estate is subject to expropriation not only with reference to his estate, but with reference also to any kind of landed property that he may own, even if used for purposes of small farming, provided it is not listed in the land register as a peasant's farm) is in accord with the intention of the legislator, the Constituent Assembly, as expressed chiefly by the majority parties on the occasion of the debates on the Agrarian Law — namely: that the landed property held by owners of baronial estates is to be liquidated and the land to be allotted, for the benefit of the Esthonian state, to the original population of the country."

From the fact that the owners of baronial estates are contrasted here with the original population, it follows that the former are absolutely thought of as a racial group, and that the intention of the legislator was to liquidate the land holdings of this racial group, the Balts, and to redistribute the land in such a manner as to favor to the greatest possible extent another racial group, the Esthonians.

The political nature of the Agrarian Reform, its purpose to destroy the land-ownership of a racial minority, crops out very plainly here. Economic reasons are not even as much as mentioned, which seems rather a remarkable circumstance when dealing with a "purely economic reform", as which the Esthonian press would have the agrarian legislation appear.

The second example is found in a pamphlet published in English by the Esthonian consul in Helsingfors, Mr. Emil Vesterinen, and entitled "Agricultural Conditions in Esthonia" (Helsingfors, 1922). In his preface

the author states that he obtained his information from the Esthonian Ministries of Agriculture and of Foreign Affairs. The pamphlet must consequently be regarded as a semiofficial publication. The two ministries mentioned are, moreover, absolutely controlled by the Labor Party, which, as has been pointed out before, is the most zealous champion of the Agrarian Reform, having played a decisive part both in the drawing up and the execution of the law. So it is a particularly authoritative source that we are about to quote now.

After reproaching the Balts at great length with all sorts of acts of harsh treatment and injustice toward the Esthonian people, the pamphlet then continues: "Things like these prompted the government and people to *break the German rule forever by means of the drastic Agrarian Law*. On October 10, 1919, the Esthonian Constituent Assembly passed a law whereby all the baronial estates, with all their privileges, became the property of the state."

So we find here again that persons who ought to be well informed on the matter do not mention any other motive than that of purely racial policy. The Agrarian Law, which is described as "drastic", i. e. more radical than necessary, was to be the means of breaking the Balto-Saxon rule. In other words, it was a means to suppress the racial minority in the country. The so-called "German rule" had ceased to exist long before the deliberations on the Agrarian Law began. The term "German rule" was chosen only in order to convey to persons ignorant of the actual facts the impression that there was some valid excuse for the unscrupulous race persecution that is indulged in.

The evidence of these two statements, coming from sources by no means benevolent to the Balts, shows conclusively that we are absolutely right in declaring that the Agrarian Reform in Esthonia was intended as a means of suppressing a racial minority.

The originators of the Agrarian Law wanted to deprive the Baltic minority of their landed property and thus separate them from the soil, the foundation of their existence. That is the inevitable inference resulting from the facts set forth so far, but it becomes even more impressively clear from the *methods by which the reform is put into practice*.

Even if it had been necessary from considerations of national economy to cut up the large estates one and all (which, as we emphatically protest, was not the case) it would have seemed natural, from reasons of justice and humanity, that the original owner should in each instance be allowed to retain at least one of the lots according to his choice, preferably the one comprising his homestead, farm-buildings, garden, and park. From the economic point of view it would, moreover, have been best to let these agriculturists of many years' experience go on in their occupation in which they were turning their knowledge and ability to account for the benefit of the country. But in vain do we look in the law for any provision which would serve such a purpose; the Balts — we must remember — were to be driven, as far as possible, from the ground in which they were rooted; considerations of justice, humanity, and economic expediency were absolutely relegated to the background.

Still the law left a possibility for the former owner to retain part of his estate and remain in his old dwelling, not in the capacity of proprietor, but in that of a tenant of nationalized land. It was at this point that the officials of the Ministry of Agriculture who had to attend to the execution of the reform began their peculiar work. It is truly wonderful

with what ingenious zeal that ministry espoused the real intentions of the legislators, and how its officials strained every nerve to aggravate the effect of the law to the utmost possibility.

Details will be taken up at a later place; here we shall describe only in general outlines the treatment accorded to the former proprietors.

In many cases the former estate owners received no land at all when their estates were parcelled out; for the common practice was simply to omit their names from the list of applicants for the parcels to be allotted. In a few exceptional cases it happens that one or the other proprietor is allowed to retain his dwelling-house (in consideration of a high rental, of course); as a rule, however, he is pitilessly driven from house and home and sees strangers move into his old family homestead. Thus he is put into a position which makes it impossible for him to remain at the place of his accustomed activity. Economic circumstances and, in no small degree, an unbearable moral atmosphere, in which the annoying tricks of the officials from the Agricultural Ministry play an important part, force him to give up his calling, he leaves the country and seeks a new existence elsewhere. Thus it is brought about that the number of Balts with a well-founded existence in the country is rapidly decreasing — the purpose of the Agrarian Reform is being accomplished.

What has been set forth in the above paragraphs may be summed up as follows:

According to the intention of the legislators, according to the provisions of the law itself, according to the judgment of non-prevaricating Esthonian authorities, and according to the methods of its execution, the Agrarian Reform in Esthonia serves the purpose of terminating Balto-Saxon ownership of land in Esthonia. It represents a measure by which the Esthonian majority seeks to deprive the Baltic minority of its direct connection with the soil of the country. It is a deadly menace to the continued existence of that racial minority. Special attention should be given to this point when it comes to devising measures for the protection of racial minorities.

But there is still another way in which the Agrarian Law of Esthonia appears to be directed against the racial minority:

The Esthonian constitution provides that "in the republic of Esthonia the inviolability of his private property is guaranteed to every citizen regardless of religion, language, or race, and that it can be expropriated without the consent of the owner only in the interest of the commonwealth and on the basis of laws."

In this form, however, the constitution does not afford the minorities any guaranty at all that their private property will be protected, for the "interest of the commonwealth" is determined by the majority, just as the majority passes the laws. The concluding clause of that provision makes the stipulation expressed in the first clause worthless to any minority.

It is, of course, undeniable that there must be cases in every commonwealth where the individual should give up certain rights of property for the benefit of public interest. Otherwise the construction of highways and railroads, for example, would be impossible. Nor do we think

of denying the desirability of fostering a strong and economically sound class of peasant farmers, for which purpose a part of excessively large land-holdings should be compulsorily expropriated, if necessary.

But according to European conceptions of right, the interests of private owners should in all such cases be safeguarded by provisions which guarantee them adequate compensation for the loss of property. One type of property, as for example: real estate by money. John Stuart Mill formulated this principle with reference to landed property as follows:

"The state is free to dispose of landed property as the collective interest of the community may demand — but only on condition that the full market value of the land is returned to the owner, otherwise expropriation would be nothing else but robbery."

The Esthonian constitution, however, contains no provision which guarantees compensation in cases of expropriation of private property. It has already been pointed out that, on that account, the property of any minority is left unprotected to the pleasure of the majority.

In order to explain this omission in the Esthonian constitution one can only assume that sufficient consideration was not given to European views of right and justice when the constitution was drawn up. We believe that that was not due so much to a lack of such conceptions in the legislators, as to the fact that race hatred and the desire to crush the economic strength of the Baltic minority crowded out all other considerations.

We are even convinced that this gap was intentionally left in the constitution with a view to the coming Agrarian Law. We will show in the following what its consequences have been for the Baltic minority.

In accordance with the principle of John Stuart Mill, the respective provision in the Agrarian Law ought to have read:

"For expropriated property a compensation must be paid equaling the full market value at the time of expropriation."

What do we find instead?

1. The question of compensation that may possibly be paid for the expropriated land is left to a special law to be issued later on.

No such law has been enacted up to the present, nor any bill of that type submitted to parliament.

2. The compensation payable for the expropriated live stock is to be based on the market price of 1914.

3. The compensation payable for the expropriated dead stock is to be based on the price paid for the article in question when it was acquired; an appropriate deduction for wear and tear is to be made.

The appraisal of the stock is in the hands of committees made up of representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, of the district government, and of the local council. The owner may send a representative, and both parties may invite experts to be present.

The decisions of the appraisal committees may, if there has been a violation of the appraisal regulations, be protested against by appealing to the "Main Appraisal Commission", which is made up of high government officials.

These regulations spell direct financial injury to the former estate owners, in whom the legislators — as we showed above — saw prima-

rily members of the Baltic minority. They receive, for the time being, actually no compensation for the land taken from them, while the expropriation becomes effective at once. So they have no possibility of investing their capital otherwise, a circumstance which means economic ruin for most of them. Another injury is to be seen in the stipulation that the agricultural stock is to be appraised on the basis of the market prices in 1914 or at the time of purchase, while the market prices at the time of expropriation were several times as high, owing to the universal advance of prices during the years after the war.

Regarding the expropriation of farm stock, the Agrarian Law contains a restricting stipulation which is evidently intended to confine the injurious economic consequences as much as possible to the owners of baronial estates, the Balts — just as had been done in connection with the so-called "landstelles". For this stipulation says that the stock belonging to the *tenant of an estate* shall be exempt from expropriation unless he is at the same time the owner of a baronial estate. There are among the tenants quite a number of Estonians, whose economic weakening is evidently not so desirable for the public weal as that of the Baltic estate owners. But in what respect the economic situation of an estate *tenant* is altered by the fact he once was the owner of a now expropriated baronial estate — that is a thing which the unsophisticated lay mind will never be able to find out. Once more it becomes evident that the legislators sought, above all, to prejudice the interests of the owners of baronial estates, thinking of them not so much in the capacity of estate owners as in that of members of the Baltic race. —

So much for the law itself. It doubtless spelled serious economic injury to the estate owner. But the amount of the indemnity payable for the expropriated farming stock depended on two additional factors, viz. the good will of the appraisal committee and the rate of converting the Gold Rouble into Estonian Marks. For the values were to be fixed in the former currency, while payment had to be made in the latter.

The law gives no clue as to the rate at which this conversion should be made. But the Estonian government issued a series of rules governing the execution of the Agrarian Law. Among these there is a rule, in itself quite just, stating that the value of the Estonian Mark should be determined in accordance with the purchasing power which it possesses, at the time being, in the domestic market. And the government reserved for itself the right to fix that rate from year to year. It had, therefore, a chance to prove its good will toward the minority, which had already suffered such serious losses through the reform. Moreover, plain logic and justice demanded that the government should put into actual effect its own decree which prescribed that the value of the Estonian Mark should be fixed in accordance with its purchasing power. But that is just what was not done. For 1920, the ratio between the Estonian Mark and the Gold Rouble was fixed at 1 : 20, whereas the actual ratio obtaining at the date of this decision, March 31, 1920, was 1 : 73. Owing to the continued depreciation of the Mark, the ratio went down to 1 : 114 by August 1, 1920, and to 1 : 221 by January 1, 1921. These figures are not founded on any official statistics, as such are unfortunately not available, but they are the result of a painstaking private investigation. They may be doubted, but not refuted. There is no disputing the fact that the government set the rate for the conversion of the Gold Rouble at many times too low a figure, to the detriment of the dispossessed owners.

and in contravention of its own decree. And, indeed, the government itself realized this when, at the beginning of 1921, it became necessary to fix a new rate of conversion.

But the inference which the government drew from this new insight is highly characteristic of its ideas of right and justice when it is a question of paying the detested Balts as little as possible. Instead of establishing a new rate of conversion, more in harmony with actual market conditions, it modified its ordinance of March 1920 and decreed that the value of the Estonian Mark should henceforth not be fixed according to its purchasing power, but according to the discretion of the government itself. The last semblance of justice was abandoned and the doors opened wide to governmental arbitrariness.

The rate of conversion for 1921 was fixed at 1 : 40, which was even more unfavorable than the rate of 1920, because the Mark had proportionately lost far more in purchasing power since that time.

Thus the government, with utter disregard of fairness and justice, did all that was in its power to rob the Baltic minority of its fortune and economic strength.

Let us now cast a glance upon the work done by the *appraisal committees*.

From their very composition it could be expected that they would be guided in their activities by the intentions of the leading "agrarian reformers", which were: make the compensations as small as possible! The agent of the Ministry of Agriculture naturally represented the views of that ministry, which, in turn, was under the absolute control of the originators of the Agrarian Law. The representative of the local administration was also interested in keeping the figures down because the new settlers from his community were to obtain the valuable stock at the lowest possible prices. Thus it was pretty certain that the appraisal would keep within very low figures.

To make this doubly sure, the Ministry of Agriculture issued an instruction for the appraisal committees, in which the pre-war prices of the various types of stock were given in detail. But the figures given in that instruction did not correspond at all to the actual pre-war prices; they were far too low. What good did it do that the ministry, in response to the energetic protests of the Estonian Agricultural Society, declared that the instruction should henceforth not be obligatory, but serve only as guidance? A large part of the work had already been done, and the appraisers knew very well now what kind of appraisal would please the ministry.

And indeed, the committees proved exceedingly successful in putting down the value of the stock they had to appraise. In the majority of cases they even went below the prices indicated in that notorious instruction, and they developed a particularly fertile imagination in computing the amounts to be deducted for wear and tear.

They all worked hand in hand in perfect unison for the purpose of doing as much harm as possible to the detested Balt and of robbing him of his entire property if they could: the Constituent Assembly with its Agrarian law, which granted no compensation for the expropriated land and based the compensation for expropriated stock on pre-war prices; the government, which was unfair in fixing the rate

of conversion; the Ministry of Agriculture, which issued an instruction with pre-war prices that were intentionally kept too low; and finally the appraisal committees, which did all they could to complete the work of ruining their fellow citizens of Baltic race.

One example may illustrate the result of this activity. In 1914, a good work-horse cost 300 Gold Roubles, which would be the equivalent of 6000 Estonian Marks at the conversion rate of 1920. The instruction of the Ministry of Agriculture, however, does not allow more than 150 Gold Roubles or 3000 Marks to be paid for a work-horse free from imperfections. The price actually paid for 1215 horses from 59 expropriated estates was 1950 Esth. Marks per horse, whereas the real market price obtaining in the same year (1920) ranged from 25 000 to 30 000 Estonian Marks.

So the Estonian majority, by their clever manipulations, brought it about that the Baltic estate owners received only from 6 to 8% of the value of the expropriated stock by way of "compensation".

The example cited above is by no means an exceptional case; but it would exceed the scope of the present article to enumerate more of them. Persons interested will find more material in the pamphlets "*Die Agrarfrage in Estland*" by Oscar Bernmann,* and "The Republic of Estonia and Private Property" by Ernest Fromme.** With the help of these two publications, persons not at all conversant with local conditions in Estonia may inform themselves adequately regarding the Estonian Agrarian Reform.

But it is necessary here to mention one more stipulation of the Agrarian Law which inflicts serious damage on even wider circles of the Baltic population of Estonia.

The State, while claiming all the rights connected with the possession of the estates, refuses to shoulder also the liabilities. Hence it declared the mortgages encumbering the expropriated estates to be purely personal debts of the former owners. It goes without saying, of course, that the estate owners, ruined through the Agrarian Reform, are not able to pay even the interest on these mortgages.

Normally, a loan granted on the security of real estate is regarded as one of the safest investments. Hence it was natural that persons who had no other chance of putting their capital to profitable use and who cared primarily for safety invested their money in mortgages. All these persons, among whom the Balto-Saxons form the great majority, are now likewise deprived of their fortunes, although the Agrarian Reform should, by rights, not affect them at all. Untold misery is, of course, the consequence. Just imagine how indignant the Estonians would be if these government practices were to affect appreciably large numbers among them! As, however, the victims belong almost exclusively to the Balto-Saxon minority, the majority views the matter with equanimity.

To sum up:

The Agrarian Law of Estonia is not in keeping with recognized European standards of law and justice, but seeks to inflict as much damage as possible on the Baltic estate owners. The same motive and

*) edited only in German.

**) Baltischer Verlag u. Ostbuchhandlung G. m. b. H., Berlin W. 30, Motzstr. 22.

the same disregard for justice actuate the government, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the executing organs. The result is that the racial minority is subjected to serious economic harm by the majority, and finds its very existence in dire jeopardy. It is at this point, therefore, that any protection of the minorities should intervene.

The Estonian government is willing to guarantee the protection of racial minorities and to make a declaration to that effect before the League of Nations. A racial minority can hope for continued existence only if its direct connection with the soil and the inviolability of its private property are guaranteed. For this reason the declaration referred to should contain a provision running somewhat like this:

The private property of all citizens of the republic of Estonia, regardless of religion, language, or race, is guaranteed to be inviolate; it can be expropriated without the consent of the owner only in the interest of public welfare and on the basis of laws (§ 24 of the constitution). But such expropriation laws must be formulated so as not to make it impossible for a racial minority to preserve its direct connection with the soil, nor must such laws prejudice the property rights of the members of a racial minority.

Note: The provisions of the preceding paragraph apply also to the expropriation of privately owned real estate, and live and dead stock, as effected in pursuance of the law of October 10, 1919. Especially the law to be enacted regarding compensation for expropriated land must be in accord with these provisions.

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