

British Coal Commission Hearings

THE recent hearings on the nationalization of mines, held by the British Coal Commission in the King's Robing Room of the House of Lords, developed an interesting controversy between the representatives of the miners on the Commission and several of the largest titled owners of coal-producing land in Great Britain, subpoenaed by the Commission to give evidence chiefly as to the validity of their titles. The following extracts from the testimony, as reported in the London Times of May 8, 9, and 10, indicate the scope and the intent of the inquiry.

Lord Durham, the first witness, is the owner of 21,411 acres of coal land in the County of Durham, of which, he stated, approximately 6000 acres were purchased within the last 100 years, 4000 acres between 1720 and 1820, while the remainder was "ancient land owned by the Lambton family."

Mr. Smillie. I suppose it may be taken that the land, which includes the minerals and metals, is essential to the life of the people? Do you agree?—Lord Durham. If you like, I accept that. They can not live in the air.

Q. Provided a limited number of people hold the whole of the land, they practically hold the lives of the people in the land at their disposal?—A. I do not accept that.

Q. You do agree that land is essential to the life of the people, but you will not accept the proposal that if the land is in the hands of a limited number of people, practically they hold the lives of the people at their disposal?—A. The lives of the people who live on my land are as happy as

those on any other land, and it makes no difference whether I own it or not.

Q. Land is quite as necessary to life as fresh water or air or sunshine?—A. Or bread.

Q. We can not get bread without land. It is one of its purposes to produce bread. You say you own the coal under 12,411 acres of land in the County of Durham?—A. Yes.

Q. I suppose you claim the ownership of the surface of the land with the minerals under it?—A. Certainly, in nearly every case.

Q. Do you know whether the law of England allows any person to own land in the full sense?—A. I am not a constitutional lawyer, but I consider that my title to my land is established by the laws of this country.

Mr. Smillie then quoted Williams on "Real Property," in which it was said: "The first thing the student has to do is to get rid of the idea of absolute ownership. Such an idea is quite unknown in English law. No man in law is absolute owner of his lands, but only holds estate in them."

"Do you agree with Williams?" asked Mr. Smillie. Lord Durham. I have not read him, but I know I am only tenant for life of those lands.

Q. But you say you own it?—A. For my life.

Mr. Smillie next quoted Coke, who said that all lands were tenements under the law of England and no subject held land except by the King. "Do you agree with Coke?" asked Mr. Smillie.

The witness protested that it was not fair to ask him questions on extracts read without the contexts.

Q. Do you agree with the general proposition that no person can hold land in England under the law, but may possess it for the time being?—A. I do not give an opinion one way or the other. I am not a constitutional lawyer.

Q. I will quote a constitutional lawyer, Blackstone, who says: "It is a received and undeniable principle of law that all lands in England are held immediately of the King." Do you deny Blackstone's authority? If he is correct you can not hold the land you claim to own.—A. That is your opinion. My family has owned land for a great many years and no one has disputed it.

"We dispute it now," interjected Mr. Smillie amid laughter. Continuing, Mr. Smillie said: "I will quote another. There is a very old Book which says, 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof.' I am not exactly sure of the author, but it appears in the Bible, upon which you have promised to tell the truth and the whole truth this morning. Would you deny that authority?"

Lord Durham. I prefer another authority, which says, "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God's."

Mr. Smillie. That is exactly what I want to be done at the present time, because if "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof," it can not be the property of individuals. (Laughter.)

Lord Durham (to the Chairman.) Is this an ecclesiastical examination? (Loud Laughter.)

Neil Maclean, M.P., on Why the Government Sent Troops to Russia

Neil Maclean, M.P., knows why the armies of Entente Capitalism are pouring into Russia, and he told the House of Commons why, though the Press took jolly good care that he would not be allowed to tell the country.

On the 29th May, during the debate upon the Daily Herald's exposure of the Army Office circular to the Colonels about strike-breaking and Churchill's "able defence" thereof (vide Glasgow Herald posters,) Neil declared:—

"The people of this country, the Trade Unionists of the country at their conferences and Trade Union branch meetings, are passing resolutions demanding the withdrawal of our troops from Russia. Yet those troops remain. Why? What is the cause of it? The real cause is not the cause which the Secretary of State for War gave today. The real cause is because there is so much British capital invested in Russia and because we want to be sure that there is a Government in Russia which will safeguard the capital invested. [Hon. Members: "Hear, hear!" and "No, no!"] It is estimated that there is today invested in Russia £1,600,000,000 of European capital. . . . That is the real reason for the conflict in Russia. The money of the Capitalists of this country is being invested side by side with the Germans—the Hun whom you have been denouncing for so many years, and whom you have been fighting for four and one-half years—they are investing money in that country and trying to draw dividends from it; that is the real reason for the intervention in Russia. We find volunteers being appealed for to go to Russia, and responding. I have not yet heard or seen in any paper the name of any gentleman amongst those in these records which I have of shares, who has volunteered to go out to Russia to fight for his investments. It is the boys who have gone through the war, and who are drawn from

the working classes. Hon. Members denounce the Bolsheviks, applaud every statement that is made against them, and shout down everyone from this side of the House who tries to say anything that is looked upon as Bolshevism by them. I find hon. and right hon. members of this House with money invested in Russia. I FIND THREE GENTLEMEN WHO SIT ON THE FRONT GOVERNMENT BENCH WITH MONEY INVESTED IN RUSSIA. [An Hon. Member: "Why not?"] Why not? Then do not let us have it said that we are there for high ideals. Tell us the right reason why you are there: to fight for your investments, as you went to war in South Africa for the goldfields. . . . Munitions of war and guns are sent from this country. Why? Another evidence of the strength of the armament trusts in this country. It is because the investors, shareholders and directors in the Birmingham Small Arms Company and in Armstrong, Whitworth & Co. have money invested. That has always been the game of the armament companies. They say—"Let us go to war, let us have scares of war so that we can unload our stocks upon some country, reap the money from it, and divide the surplus amongst our shareholders."

It is the old question over again—the trail of the financial serpent—men who say they can not find investments in their own country invest abroad, and when rebellion, civil war, or revolution springs up in that country they are scared, because they fear the loss of their capital abroad, when times of disorder come they fear they are going to lose it, and they use the interest they undoubtedly have with the Government to have intervention in those countries, to send troops to prevent their capital being lost.

There was an invitation for volunteers. As I have said already, not one of the men whose names I have here—and I have the names of

1500 British shareholders in Russia—has volunteered to go to Russia to fight for his investments there. If they want to fight for their money, or if their money is worth saving, let them go and fight for it. . . . We went into a war to crush Prussian militarism. Yes, and Prussian militarism is the one commodity in the world that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has allowed to come into this country without putting a tax upon it. [An Hon. Member: "No preferential tariff there!"] . . . The rights of the community against any section! De we find the Government asking the troops to send in their views as to the Big Five, as to the operations of the Meat Trust in America sending up the price of food to their relatives in this country. Do we find that the troops are being asked to send in their views in regard to the land owners of this country, who are preventing—"

And so on. All true. But a Capitalist newspaper published a line of it.

We are interested in these 1500 Russian investors. Can not we publish them—Neil!

SIBERIA.

A captain in the Intelligence Division of the American Expeditionary Force, serving in Siberia states, in an amazing article in "Hearsts" Magazine for June, that "ninety-five per cent. of the people in Siberia are Bolshevik," while, "the Trans-Siberian Railway is virtually in the hands of the Bolsheviks." Kolehak's one support is his army and even in the army, according to the report of a recent arrival from Siberia, writing in the New York Times, every soldier is "as much a Bolshevik as the soldier he is fighting against." Returned Canadian soldiers also report to the same effect. It's a strange perversity those Russians suffer from. They would rather have Lenin than Wilson. Communism than Capitalism.