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Review

Author(s): G. F. Shove

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Source: *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 91 (Sep., 1913), pp. 436-437

Published by: Wiley on behalf of the Royal Economic Society

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2222567>

Accessed: 27-06-2016 02:31 UTC

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The Economic Journal

Leasehold Enfranchisement. By E. A. COLLINS. (London : P. S. King and Son. 1913. Pp. 117.)

MR. COLLINS writes as an advocate of compulsory enfranchisement. In the main, he bases his case on a general statement of the leaseholder's grievances. This is to be regretted. No one would now deny that the leasehold system is capable of abuse, and that, in fact, it sometimes is abused. The extent of the evil is more difficult to ascertain. Mr. Collins throws no light on that point. True, he tells us that he has twenty-five years' experience as a solicitor in London, and his general impressions are therefore entitled to some weight. But the leasehold system which is the rule in London is the exception in the country as a whole. We are not confident that Mr. Collins has altogether avoided the mistake—so common in Londoners—of assuming that the metropolis is typical of all large towns. At any rate, he affords us no material for a quantitative analysis of the situation.

The fact that an evil is not widespread is, of course, no reason for neglecting it if the remedies proposed are effective and do not involve any considerable inconveniences. It is doubtful whether the somewhat old-fashioned proposal which Mr. Collins supports satisfies either of these conditions. He suggests that all future leases (other than mining leases) granted for a life or lives, or with a perpetual right of renewal or for terms exceeding thirty years, should by statute include the same right of compulsory purchase as is now given to railway companies and other corporate bodies. This right should be given also to the holders of existing leases that fall within the above definition. Contracting out should be forbidden. There is one serious weakness in this scheme, as in all schemes of a like nature. If a long lease is made to carry with it an option to buy the freehold, there will be a tendency among owners who object to selling outright—and Mr. Collins tells us that they are numerous—to substitute for the long lease a short lease with a tacit undertaking to renew. The short lease is open, in a greater or less degree, to almost all the objections that apply to the long lease, and its tenure is less secure. With the details of Mr. Collins's plan we have not space to deal. It must suffice to remark that he considerably underestimates the difficulties in his way. It is surprising, for instance, to find a lawyer calmly accepting the principles of valuation laid down in the Lands Clauses Acts, and in the case-law that has grown up round them, as "a system that has worked satisfactorily": the tendency of all recent legislation providing for the compulsory purchase of land is to override and upset that system.

Though Mr. Collins is chiefly concerned with leasehold enfranchisement, he makes one or two other proposals which are more in accord with the trend of modern opinion. Thus he would empower the leaseholder to have onerous covenants set aside by showing cause before a permanent Commission constituted for this and similar duties. In the case of short leases the leaseholder should, he urges, have a statutory right of renewal subject to an appeal to the Commission. There seems to be a growing consensus of opinion that the problems connected with the tenure of land are to be solved by the institution of some such machinery for arbitration between landlord and tenant, rather than by rigid regulations like the statutory provision for a universal right of compulsory enfranchisement. But those who wish to obtain a clear and concise statement of the arguments advanced by the older school of reformers cannot do better than read Mr. Collins's little book.

G. F. SHOVE