

MEERUT :

Dated 28th February, 1940.

Dear Friend,

Herewith I am sending you a copy of a Bill which seeks to transfer the proprietary interest in the agricultural holdings of this province to their actual cultivators by compensating the land-lords and to prevent their sub-division below a certain minimum. I am enclosing two articles also written in justification of these objects.

The Bill is inspired by the ideal that in our country whose economic life is almost entirely based on agriculture and whose peasants constitute 80% of the tax-payers, political progress or agrarian reform has no meaning unless it tends towards a rural democracy—towards the creation of a peasant proprietary where there will be no land-lord and no tenant and the peasant will be at once a wage-earner and a proprietor.

The great advantage of peasant proprietorship is that it confers the utmost security against confiscation of improvements and such security has been universally recognized as a condition precedent to efficient farming. The various Tenancy Acts are an attempt at remedying this evil of insecurity, but they have resulted in a system of dual ownership where the land-lord has been reduced to the position of a mere receiver of rent and yet the tenant is not the owner. While compensation for improvements and safe-guards against capricious eviction do not satisfy the tenants, real security of tenure is odious to the landlord. If the result of State interference to safeguard the tenant against insecurity is to produce the system of dual ownership, it may be necessary for that interference to be extended still further. In many countries in the West it has in fact been extended in the direction of the purchase by the State of land for transfer to the tenants, and in England its extension in the direction of land nationalization is being seriously discussed.

Peasant proprietors are also found to co-operate better than tenants paying rent, and therefore a system of peasant ownership may aid in the development of economies of production in as far as these depend on co-operative organisation. These are only two of its chief economic advantages; it has numerous moral, social and political advantages as well which have no doubt weighed the scales in favour of this class of tenure in practically every European country since the last Great War. I will ask those, who are unconvinced of the superiority of this system, to go to the villages of Meerut and Muzaffarnagar districts in our own province and of Rohtak and Karnal districts on the other side of the Jumna and to compare the condition of the farmers of these districts—a great majority of whom own the land they cultivate—with that of the farmers in Gorakhpore division and other eastern parts of the U. P. who hold land as tenants of big land-lords.

It is to be hoped that the Zemindars will all gladly agree to the reform which simply proposes the most non-violent way of revolutionizing the rural social organisation. The Malguzars of the Central Provinces are said, according to a report of the Associated