This pulled down the national income, and thereby reduced new spending power. The Great Depression was on. In general, union support of wage rigidity is a major cause of depressions.

And union opposition is one of the forces preventing the adoption of a system like that utilized by the Nunn-Bush Shoe Company, a system which, by making wage payments flexible, minimizes any necessity for laying off employees, and also eliminates most of the situations giving rise to battles over wage rates.

Since unionization, by cutting productivity and generating unemployment, *lowers* the real income and *lessens* the security of the average wage-working family, is there any legitimate excuse for elevating unions and their members to a position over and above the laws as they apply to other classes of American citizens?

Conservatives Also Confiscate

By COLM BROGAN

Through the compulsory purchase of property, the present British government continues the process of piecemeal nationalization the Laborites began.

Not long before the last General Election, I attended a press conference called to expose the evils of compulsory purchase. Nearly all the men and women I spoke to had been victims of that practice, and they assured me that they would never vote Conservative again. They would keep their votes in their pockets.

The convener of the Conference was Commander Marten. He is the man who made this business an angry national issue, though the property at stake in his own case was neither especially important nor especially desirable.

Shortly before the outbreak of war, the Air Ministry had seized a few hundred acres of rough land known as Crichel Down. The land was required for a practice bombing range, and compensation was paid to the owner in full. The owner was Commander Marten's father-in-law.

Some time after the war, the RAF had no further use for Crichel Down. Commander Marten maintained that the justification for the seizure had now disappeared and that he had the right to a first refusal, on market terms, to buy the land back (his father-in-law was now dead).

Whitehall would have none of this, but fought a protracted and expert battle of elastic defense in depth. When the crusading Commander had fought his way into the last citadel of the Air Ministry, the land mysteriously turned out to be now in the hold of the Ministry of Agriculture. After further lengthy and baffling negotiations, the land was said to be in the possession of the Commissioners for Crown Lands. It was the Circumlocution Office playing Hunt-the-Slipper, and playing it with masterly skill.

But the Commander persevered and tried to force a judicial inquiry. He won the support of all the farmers of the West Country, and for an obvious reason. He was a man of wealth, social position and considerable political influence. If, the farmers argued, Whitehall could deny justice to a man like that, what possible security of tenure could there be for humbler men? Commander Marten also won decisive support from some Conservative newspapers, and in the end he forced the hand of the Minister of Agriculture, Sir Thomas Dugdale.

Bureaucratic Arrogance Revealed

A judicial inquiry was instituted; there were ugly rumors of financial corruption circulating in the district. Sir Andrew Clarke, who held the inquiry, dismissed the possibility of corruption, but his report was otherwise a blistering condemnation of Whitehall. Several civil servants were condemned for a deplorable lack of candor and ordinary straight dealing. The bureaucratic arrogance revealed was startling, and Sir Andrew's main finding was a blunt and terse statement that all the maneuvering and obstruction had no other cause than irritation on the part of the bureaucracy that any ordinary citizen should dare to as much as question their exercise of power.

Sir Thomas Dugdale, a genial and kindly man who had been badly misled, had no option but to accept the Report and resign, which he did with moving dignity. When a leading Minister is forced to resign because of proved and serious irregularities in the Department he is supposed to control, that is normally the time for the Opposition to utter loud war whoops and look for other eminent heads to make fall. But the attack on Sir Thomas was entirely a Conservative affair, and leading Socialists expressed displeasure at the report.

The Socialists were acting in character. It is the obvious policy of administrative socialism to hang on at all costs and with whatever pretext to property that has once been compulsorily acquired; it is piecemeal nationalization. That was the policy which the Departments pursued under the direction of socialist political heads. But nearly two years after the defeat of the Attlee government, at least one Department was still pursuing that policy under an unimpeachably Conservative Minister. Was Agriculture the only Department where the Conservative Ministers had made no impact on their own permanent civil servants? It was not the Socialists but the more thoughtful and anxious Conservatives who were looking round to see if there were other heads that should fall.

Their anxiety has not diminished. Not for the first time had a determined man made a small matter a focusing point for public feeling on a great principle. But Commander Marten himself was under no illusion that the battle had been won. Lopping off the Minister's head was a simpler and easier task than decapitating the Civil Service hydra. Hence his press conference and his continued campaign for the rights of humbler victims.

The victims are numerous, for an act of compulsory purchase happens almost daily. Some unimportant citizen loses his farm or his home under terms of compensation that are little short of robbery. (Recently a farmer greeted visiting officials with a crowbar in his hand.) Compulsory purchase is by no means a new thing in Britain. The purchase Acts form a sizeable section of Halsted's Statutes, and the first of them was passed exactly a century ago.

Planning Act of 1947

But a change in practice since the end of World War One has turned an occasional nuisance into a general threat to security of tenure for anybody anywhere. Until 1919, it was the custom of the State to pay more than the full market value for any property they felt compelled to seize. It was recognized that compulsory dispossession was a wrong, to be justified perhaps by high necessity; the victim was therefore paid 10 per cent above the market price, by way of a monetary apology. After 1919 the State would pay no more than the market price. After 1947 the State has ceased to do even that.

This is the result of the Planning Act of that year, a piece of legislation that must surely hold the world's record for fantastic confusion, complication and obscurity. In general, the owner of land is not allowed to change the use of his land from that he had put it to in 1948, unless he has received permission from the Ministry, having applied under the right clause at the right time. (One man lost everything because he applied under clause ten instead of clause nine.) This means that a man who owns land used in 1948 for grazing may find by 1955 that he can enormously increase the value of his land by using it for, say, housing. But he must first secure the imperial consent of the Ministry. If a man makes an honest mistake, the penalty may be ruinous. If he alters the use of the land, perhaps by building himself a house on it, he can be compelled to restore the status quo at his own expense—even if it means pulling down the house. Ignorance of the law is no excuse, although the law in question is so obscure that any lawyer would be called a vain boaster if he pretended to have mastered it.

But another man may have complied with the law. Even though he could enormously increase its value by putting it to some other use, he has kept it frozen, so to speak, in the uneconomic use of 1948. If the land is taken from him by compulsory order, he will be paid the price of the land in its undeveloped state. So, some Ministry or local authority will get his land for a fraction of what they would have had to pay in the open market. In other words, whenever the bureaucracy choose to do so, they can and they do rob an owner of all the development value of his property.

To give one example of what might happen, there is a private school with large grounds, which was originally on the outskirts of a big city, but is now in the heart of the new business quarter. Space is so valuable in that area that the owner has been besought, time after time, by business interests to sell the site for almost any price he cares to name. He has steadfastly refused a not-so-small fortune because he considers it his duty to keep the school near the neighborhood where the pupils live, and the business interests have no power to force him to sell. But if the Council or a Ministry decides to take the land, they will simply secure an order, take over his immensely valuable property and pay him the price of so many acres of grass.

No doubt the owner of that school would have means to fight the grab, but the expense would be heavy, and his appeal would be to what is politely called a "quasi-judicial" tribunal, which means a tribunal which is quasi-judicially on the side of the expropriators before the case is heard. Even a successful appeal may prove to be useless, or nearly so.

Property Values Destroyed

There is a beautiful golf course at Byfleet in Surrey, fringed by expensive houses owned by well-to-do business and professional men. One Council attempted to seize the course for a housing estate. The Golf Club fought the case with the full support not only of the owners of the neighboring houses, but of the whole small community. The Club won its appeal, but the sighs of relief were premature. Hardly had one Council retired defeated from the field than another Council stepped in and claimed the land for itself. This is precisely the