

NATIONALISATION OF THE LAND.

SIR,—I have read Mr. Leadam's letter in your issue of Monday last very carefully, and I fail to see the reason for his invective against Mr. Wallace's scheme of land nationalisation. The State has undoubtedly a right to resume possession of the land on behalf of the nation, after paying reasonable compensation to the present holders. The whole matter, so far as justice is concerned, therefore, turns on the question whether Mr. Wallace's proposal of giving a Government annuity for three generations in return for the land *per se*, *i.e.*, apart from all landlords' and tenants' expenditure upon it, is a fair one. If it is not sufficient, some addition should undoubtedly be made. But Mr. Leadam bases his condemnation chiefly upon what he considers to be the injustice of abstracting from the value of the land *per se* the increment due to the general progress of the district in wealth and other advantages. As an illustration of the alleged injustice of this arrangement, he cites the case of a manufacturer who has, by his enterprise, created the advantages which would, under Mr. Wallace's scheme, be returned as due to the general progress in prosperity of the country or district. I fail to see that any injustice need be perpetrated under Mr. Wallace's scheme. The manufacturer would be entitled to claim as his improvements any increment in the value of his land due to his own improvements, and if he could show that the increased value of land in his district was due to his enterprise, it would be, no doubt, taken into account. But really, the supposed case is so exceptional as to be of no great importance, and what there is of importance in it is diminished by the consideration that the manufacturer has got rich by employing the cheap labour of the semi-rural district in which he has carried on his business, and so has reaped his reward. The real fallacy of Mr. Leadam's objections, however, is shown most clearly by the consideration of the fact that whatever the State would take the State would pay for, leaving the landlord to sell the rest as his improvements. Therefore, the lower the value put upon the land by the State valuer, the better it would be for this beneficent manufacturer; the lower the quit-rent of his estate, the higher the value of his tenant-right. With all respect for Mr. Leadam's ability, I am afraid I must conclude that he has found a mare's nest.

I may add that I am not yet convinced of the advisability of adopting all the details of Mr. Wallace's scheme, and I may therefore sign myself—AN INQUIRER.
