

THREAT OF FAMINE

"In press and radio there is an ever-increasing tendency to "condition" the minds of the people into accepting shortages as part of the order of things that cannot be altered. Our blood is curdled at the horrible picture of a world population growing at the rate of a hungry 20 millions every year, although on examination, by the experts' own figures, this works out at considerably less than one per cent."

"We are not specifically told that the natural resources of the earth are insufficient for its population . . . The general inference seems to be that among the producers themselves there exists some unexplained perversity which refuses to heed the admonitions of governments or make use of new discoveries. So we come back to the old familiar plea that the trouble is due not to too many but too few controls. The best advertised of the proposals for more control is that of Sir John Orr for a World Food Board or Council, in collaboration with a World Bank, administering World Plans designed to increase World Food Production, stabilise World Food Prices . . . and maintain a World Food Reserve . . . Such a scheme is very attractive, its outline appears so neat and obvious. If only we could ignore the fact that all the operations of all the officials in the world, acting as officials, cannot in themselves produce a single grain of wheat; that all the contribution they can ever make to production is the negative assistance of removing any man-made obstruction; and for this a policeman, not a planner, is required . . ."

"The scarcity, in fact, is in neither the capacity of the producers nor the resources of the earth; it is in the ability of the politicians whom the people choose to frame their laws."

"All modern experience proves that even under very imperfect conditions of freedom in exchange and the processes of production, absolute shortages do not recur; and that where natural competition is allowed to function, not only will producers readily adopt every scientific aid which can prove an advantage . . . but producers are, in fact, obliged to do so."

Threat of Abundance "If the ordinary man will carry his mind back only a few years . . . he will recall a period when his rulers drove him into a panic because of the "Surplus" of good things all over the world. This, they said, would ruin him. He trembled to think that the wicked foreigner might dump on him, free, gratis, and for nothing, a flood of good things to eat, wear or use. He was saved, so the Conservative-Socialists assured him, by the tariff umbrella, while governments burnt wheat, cotton and coffee, and taxpayers generously subsidised producers not to produce. And the Socialist-Conservatives are as firm as ever in their belief in the tariff umbrella . . ."

(From "Land & Liberty," 12/48)

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THE PORCUPINE

(WITH SOME TELLING POINTS)

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LEGALISED FRAUD AND ROBBERY There are ominous signs in this country and elsewhere of a revival of the great fraud called "Protection." An example which threatens our "export drive" comes from Australia. In 1948 the Lancashire rayon cloth sent to Australia was eight times as much as was sent in 1938, and this seems to have alarmed the four firms engaged in weaving rayon cloth in that country. These people are now pressing their Government for high tariffs against British competition. If this is successful, it will raise the price of British rayon cloth in Australia by about 2/6 a yard.

Who is protected? It is said by Protectionists that the people of a country adopting this policy will be protected from foreign competition and loss of employment. This theory is propagated by those who enjoy or seek shelter behind tariff walls, but it is obviously false; the willingness of the public to buy cheap foreign goods is proof that they do not desire such protection. Protection does, however, protect individuals and groups in the industries affected, but not from foreign competition - it protects them from the people in their own country who wish to buy the cheaper foreign commodities, and it does this by means of tariffs which make the foreign commodities as dear or dearer than those produced in the protected country. The Australian rayon cloth weavers have no need to fear their Lancashire competitors; they are asking to be protected from the Australian housewives who buy cheap rayon cloth.

Exports pay for Imports The intense post-war drive for exports should have convinced even Protectionists that exports pay for imports - we sell in order to buy. When we import food our people are employed in producing motor cars and other things to pay for it. In effect, therefore, the British workers engaged in making things to be exported are "producing" the food that is imported, and the total of employment is

unaffected. International trade is an exchange of goods and services and is of mutual benefit to buyers and sellers; it neither causes nor cures unemployment, which arises where production begins - the land - not where produce is exchanged.

Summary Protection is dishonest; it robs some people to enrich others, and it provokes international ill-will and leads to war. This is not accusing Protectionists of being dishonest; good people sometimes approve of evil policies because they do not examine and understand them. But no-one need be in doubt about the moral character and effects of what is called "Protection." Henry George's book "Protection or Free Trade" may be obtained from the "Porcupine" office, cloth covers, 2/9 post-free.

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HUMAN RIGHTS and WRONGS

The Archbishop of Canterbury said not long ago that Duties must come before Rights. That is reversing the natural order and ignoring the most fundamental and prolific cause of social unrighteousness. Man's duty to his neighbour cannot be performed if his right to life is denied. Both in time and importance, rights come before duties, and the most important of these is the right to life. This is not merely security from physical violence, it includes opportunity to obtain all things necessary to maintain life in reasonable comfort. The universal desire for such security and independence reveals an inherent attribute of man, but his persistent failure through the ages to achieve it would suggest that the ideal is impossible, were it not for the fact that the means for his emancipation are now within his reach. But human rights must be understood before they can be won. Natural rights are described in the famous American Declaration as the right to life, to liberty, and to the pursuit of happiness. These rights cannot be conferred or annulled by governments; they are Nature's endowment to every child born into the world, and when they are respected there is peace and harmony, while their violation leads to strife and discord. Legal rights are in a different category; these may be and sometimes are contrary to the natural order and devoid of moral sanction. What, for example, is called "the right to work or maintenance" is not a natural right of free men, but a slavish plea for charity. Work is a duty, not a right, and maintenance is the natural fruit of productive toil or service which rightly belongs to the worker who performs it. The great crime of modern civilisation is that men are prevented from working and thereby robbed of the means of life.

Rights are equal In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the Assembly of the United Nations last December it is recognised that there is equality in human rights. In Article 3 is the statement that "everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person," and this right can only be effective if each one may share, equally with others, in all the natural opportunities for satisfying man's material needs which Nature has provided on this planet. When deprived of the right to use land, men are not free; Their existence then depends on the goodwill or convenience of other men, and if allowed to work, they receive less than they earn.

Equality through nationalisation Economic freedom for the individual can be secured only by collective action, and the first task must be the removal of all legal barriers between the people and their use of land. The worst feature of the present land system is the landowners' legal right to withhold land from use. In a well-populated country land-withholding reduces the number of opportunities for production, and this injurious practice is encouraged by the exemption of unused land from taxes and rates, while burdensome taxation falls on those who put land to good use. A complete and practical remedy is to be found in the Nationalisation of the Rent of Land. This does not involve the payment of compensation to the landowners, and it can be accomplished by progressive measures of Land Values Taxation.

The value of all the land in town and country is due to the presence and industry of population. This land-value or economic rent can be taken in rates and taxes, justly and without undue disturbance, and by this simple measure Nature's free gift to man can be made available for all and the foundations of peace and plenty well and truly laid. Though changes thereafter might be slow, it would soon be seen that easy access to land provided all men with alternatives which enabled them to choose their jobs, decide whether to work for an employer or employ themselves, and to fix their own "minimum wage" by the only fair standard - the average earnings of self-employed men.

Duties performed Men and women in full possession and enjoyment of their rights will perform their duties without exhortation. Neglect of duties, which now provides texts for sermons and lectures, is not due to natural wickedness, but to the reactions of people suffering - perhaps unconsciously - from wrongs. When freedom is established, goodness will flourish.

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"WHO OBSERVES THE LAW AND THE PROPRIETIES, and cares for his family, yet takes no interest in the general weal, and gives no thought to those who are trodden under-foot, save now and then to bestow alms, is not a true Christian. Nor is he a good citizen." (Henry George)