

Austria - Not Fascism's Last Victim

By Harry Gunnison Brown

We hear a good deal these days about a possible conflict between the democratic countries and a fascist bloc. We are regaled with comments on the essential strength of the democracies—if they will stand together and use their strength. In all this discussion—in the so-called democratic countries—the assumption is made that these countries are much better countries for common folks to live in and that, therefore, common folks will fight eagerly and enthusiastically to maintain “free institutions” and “equal opportunities for all.”

The assumption is made—in the “democratic” countries—that democratic processes bring fairer laws and, therefore, fairer economic conditions for the masses than they can hope to enjoy when government is not democratic. Perhaps this is true.

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Perhaps, in the long run and on the average, the common man stands to fare better, when different groups of interests bargain and “log-roll” for advantage and when each group appeals to his prejudice and his lack of understanding, in attempting to gain his support against rival groups. Perhaps a dictatorship, even though it cannot keep power without making large concessions to the prejudices—and even the well-being—of the masses, offers him, in the long run, a poorer prospect.

But certainly this is not obvious to the masses. Else why have they gone along with fascism in countries like Germany and Italy? And why are there fascist mutterings even in some of the so-called democratic countries? And can we really attribute the greater prosperity of the people in democratic countries—when they truly are more prosperous—to democratic institutions and fairer economic legislation rather than to favorable natural resources?

It is true that the fascist countries make their people poor, force them to live on less, by levying protective tariffs that shut out foreign goods. Their supposed aim is self-

sufficiency, the theory being that if, during war, outside supplies were cut off, they could still manage somehow to feed and clothe their people.

But the democratic countries, also, levy tariffs to shut out foreign goods. They do this, apparently, with no special idea of safety against possible blockade. Indeed, the democratic countries are, in large degree, big-navy countries whose protection depends on the wealth which free trade brings and on the powerful navies that such wealth can enable them to maintain. The real reason for protective tariffs in the democratic countries is the pressure of interested producing groups, each wanting to shut off foreign competition so as to be able to charge domestic consumers higher prices for their goods.

Along with this is the bargaining between groups, through their legislative representatives, as a result of which the representative of one district votes for tariff duties on goods produced in other districts, in return for support from representatives of those other districts, for tariff duties which his own constituents desire. And with this, of course, there is the uninformed support of those who really believe that we can make ourselves richer by diminishing international specialization. Are the chances of the common man, in respect of tariffs, better in the democratic countries than in the fascist countries?

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On what is the most important point of all, the appropriation by the few of geologically-produced and community-produced values, the democratic countries seem to be not a whit better, for common folks, than the fascist ones. In England the land is owned in large part by

the titled aristocracy. In America we have, to be sure, no titles, but we have essentially the same land system. The fabulous community-produced location values of our great cities go into private pockets. Thus, in order that those whose work at and near New York Harbor is an important service to the rest of us, may work and live where they must work and live to render this service, they are required to pay, to the relatively few who own that part of the surface of the earth, hundreds of millions of dollars a year.

This has nothing to do with payment for the use of buildings, for the existence of which the work and saving of individuals are responsible. The payment here referred to is for ground space, which nobody made, and for location advantages made, not by individual owners, but by the whole community. Taking the United States as a whole, we may say that the majority has to pay to a relatively few, billions of dollars a year for permission to work and live on the earth, in those locations where work is reasonably effective and life reasonably sufferable.

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Is this problem handled any worse in the fascist countries? Does anyone seriously believe that the position of the worker, in comparison with that of the private owners of natural resources and community-produced site values, is any worse in the fascist countries than in such “democratic” countries as England and the United States? And that therefore the workers ought gladly to lose arms and legs, be gassed and suffer the worst disfigurements, in order to assure a continuance of their splendid economic position!

Suppose, now, that the worst should happen, that the democratic countries should really have to fight to prevent fascist domination! How “patriotic” are those who own the earth in the democratic countries, those who enjoy in their own pleasant living the community-produced values which are so fabulous? Would they be willing to relinquish these values to make their peoples richer,



stronger and safer against aggression?

If and when land-value taxation takes for the community natural resource values and community-produced location values, speculative holding of good land out of use will be a thing of the past. With the good land in use instead of largely out of use, production will be greater, wages greater, the necessities of the people better supplied, the health of the people better, the possible surplus to draw on in case of war larger.

When the annual rent of land is taken or mostly taken for community use, many, if not most, other taxes, and especially the most objectionable of these, causing most hardship, can be abolished. This will further increase the well-being of the masses and it may notably increase the amount and quality of capital.

When the annual rent of land is taken for the ordinary expenses of government, other sources of revenue are less used and hence are

available for the emergency taxation of war. And who can say how much greater would be the enthusiasm of common folk to defend their institutions, if one of the chief of these institutions were the sharing by all, of the value which all have produced?

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But with things as they are now, who knows whether some of the so-called democratic countries may not succumb through a division of sentiment, and because of fascist sympathies within their own borders? Who knows whether some of their people may not regard the advancing fascists as liberators? How be certain that the tortured poor, suffering from unemployment, low wages, slum life in the cities and tenancy in the country, would not look to the fascist way of life with hope rather than with dread?

It was not after but before Hitler's final coup in Austria that the marching Styrian Nazis staged the demonstration which is thus de-

scribed by the New York Times correspondent (G. E. R. Geyde):

"Blazing fanaticism was written on every face to a degree almost terrifying to the sober onlooker. One saw it in the taut facial muscles, blazing eyes, clenched fists, and rigid stamping legs of the goose-stepping Storm Troop lads, but no less in the frenzied eyes of the women and older men, humble middle-class people for the most part, hungry-looking and clinging to these strange new slogans that, shouted loud enough, were bound to bring them into the promised land of prosperity."

Twenty years before the event, ten years before, perhaps five years before, it is possible to be scornful of the suggestion that such things are to occur. But are men and women in Austria so altogether different from men and women in France, in England, and in the United States? What of the future,—if the many continue to have to pay the few for permission to work and to live on the earth?