

Thanksgiving Prayer for Pres. Hoover

FORGIVE us our debts, as we forgive our debtors from whom we can't collect.—BOLTON HALL.

BOOK REVIEW

ECONOMIC SCIENCE AND THE COMMON WELFARE*

Professor Brown has made for himself a unique position in the field of economics. He is that *rara avis*, a college professor who is not afraid to think aloud and express his thoughts even if those thoughts happen to run counter to the views of other teachers of political economy.

Most people, he writes, approach the subject with bias and inherited opinions, lacking in scientific validity.

"That the most glaring economic fallacies are supported by leading public men, probably, in large part, because, whatever their abilities at speech-making or in vote-getting, they understand economic principles no better than they understand physiological chemistry or the lanetesimal theory of the origin of our solar system, is a fact familiar to all economists." (Page 6.)

If the American voter could read and digest this book, he would quickly separate from the United States Senate such pseudo-economists as Senators Smoot, Watson and Borah, who prate about protecting American labor with a tariff, to say nothing of President Hoover and the so-called economists who surround him.

"The student of economics who would serve well his country and the world, needs most of all, perhaps, an enthusiasm for science. He must seek above all things to avoid prejudice in his thinking, to think clearly, to acquire information of scientific value and to use it logically. But, next to his enthusiasm for science, he should have a concern for the common welfare, so that, when he sees relationships of cause and effect in the economic realm an understanding of which will help to solve the problems of economic society and to further this welfare, he will endeavor in such ways as he can to make these relationships known. Scientific thinking must come first, else, even with the greatest good will in the world, we shall have only 'blind leaders of the blind.' But concern for the common welfare may properly be a motive to effort only second to the enthusiasm for science." (Page 8.)

This is the fifth edition of a work first published in 1923. It is truly a thought-provoking book. This reviewer, who has been studying the subject for over 25 years, found much to ponder over.

The book is in marked contrast to a volume (which shall remain nameless here) purporting to solve the problem of hard times, written by another college professor, which I reviewed a short time ago. That book was marked by artificiality, insincerity and downright dishonesty; this book breathes earnestness, conviction and a determination to spread the truth.

Lest I be accused of awarding too much approval, I want first to make six criticisms, five minor, one more substantial.

In a chapter wherein he discusses the forces behind supply and demand, Professor Brown, referring to those who refuse to act in accord with the ethical standards of community life, writes:

"And so, when all other motives and arguments fail, appeal must be made to such deterrents as jail and the hangman's rope." (Page 263.)

Is not the professor here a bit intemperate?

Is not our problem an objective one, namely to establish a rational economic order, rather than a personal one, and the scourging of individuals?

Professor Brown, at page 45, negatives the words I have just quoted. Here he writes:

"The untrained mind is prone to explain occurrences in terms of the activities of individuals rather than in terms of more or less impersonal forces."

I think Professor Brown might have been a bit more emphatic in his statement (page 19) of the futility of government price regulation.

*By Harry Gunnison Brown. Fifth edition; published by Lucas Brothers, Columbia, Mo.

The experiences of the rubber, coffee and wheat growers in Great Britain, Brazil and the United States, respectively, conclusively show that government price regulation is not *difficult*, as Professor Brown believes, but *impossible*. Likewise, the professor's statement on the same page, that it is extremely doubtful if governments could effectively regulate production and consumption, appears too mild in view of the experiences of these same governments. The sugar growers of the world will be next to learn that not even price regulation over the entire globe can be effective or successful.

The disastrous experiences of the Brazilian coffee growers, British rubber growers and American wheat growers have taught them nothing.

A more serious criticism I would direct at the chapter on Wages and Population. Here Professor Brown takes his position with those who advocate birth restriction as a means of eliminating poverty. Now, one can have no quarrel with those who believe in birth control, per se. Nature, someone has said, is deaf, dumb, blind and neutral, and unquestionably some degree of control must be practiced in all fields of life. An oyster produces millions of eggs of which only a handful grow to maturity. Fish spawn millions, of which only a few dozen survive to become big fish. Man, believe it or not, is capable of being the father of hundreds of children, and woman is capable of bearing children continuously from her fifteenth or sixteenth year to her climacteric. Our acceptance of monogamy requires that we practice some degree of control over our reproductive capacities. It seems to me, however, that there is a vital difference between a philosophy of birth regulation, which has for its central core a limitation of new life, to accord with the profligacy of nature, and a philosophy of birth control which seeks thus to eliminate poverty.

Professor Brown writes:

"Continuous increase of population, since natural resources are limited, tends towards diminished per capita production." (Page 369.)

There are, it seems to me, at least two errors in this statement. Only in a strictly philosophical sense may it be said that natural resources are limited. It is doubtful if the human mind is capable of conceiving our potential resources, *given a Free Earth and opportunity to exploit the Earth's resources*. Likewise, increased population tends toward increased, not diminished, per capita production. I am more efficient as I produce in cooperation with my fellow-man. Increased population permits greater specialization, which means greater efficiency.

A hundred million people in the United States live better than ten million formerly lived. Of course, at a certain point, the law of diminishing returns comes into play, that is, there finally comes a point where the United States, and in fact any country, could not stand the increase of another individual. I repeat: No human mind has sufficient imagination to say what that limit is.

Most hazards of population increase (based on past experience), have been far from the mark. President Lincoln, for example, in his first inaugural address in 1861, wrote:

"There are already among us those who, if the Union be preserved, will live to see it contain 250,000,000."

Seventy years later we have not yet reached one half that number.

Estimates of the earth's capacity (failing, as they must, to consider such undeterminable factors as invention and discovery) are even bigger guesses. This we may safely say: that the United States with 40 inhabitants to the square mile, if rationally organized from the economic view-point, may be considered woefully underpopulated. France supports 200 people to the square mile, Germany 350, Argentine 9, Australia 2, Canada 2.6.

True, many of the present inhabitants of the United States, as well as the countries which I have just named, do not receive adequate food, clothing and shelter, but does any thinking person claim that this is because of the niggardliness of the Creator?

Listen to the answers of the American and European farmers, who don't know what to do with all the grains and vegetables they have produced; the Argentinian cattle and sheep raisers, who are unable

to sell their flocks; the clothing manufacturers, who are worrying why their suits of clothing remain on their shelves, etc., etc.

No, it is not overproduction but underconsumption from which we are suffering.

In an hour's ride from the center of New York I will take Professor Brown to New Jersey, or out on Long Island or Staten Island, and show him tens of thousands of acres of land standing idle, badly in need of human hands to work them. What is true of New York is true of Chicago, Philadelphia and every other large city, not only in the United States but all over the world.

Not even China is overpopulated. The fear of overpopulation is therefore academic, like the college student's fear of what would happen when the coal supply of our planet would be exhausted.

Professor Brown writes (page 371):

"Nothing is so important as to establish the principle that those who bring children into the world must provide these children with a childhood not wholly devoid of opportunity and of happiness, and therefore, by implication, that they must not have more children than can be so provided."

This statement is hardly in keeping with the sound thinking of the rest of the book. In the first place, in our present economic disorder, no parent knows, when he brings even one child into the world, whether or not he will be able to provide for him. Given the responsibility to support a new life, every normal man and woman gladly assumes the burden. All a normal father asks is *opportunity to work*, to support his child, and with the arrival of each additional child every normal father is stimulated to greater and greater activity. Our present lack of system denies him this opportunity.

Professor Brown believes that the reason why large classes of population cannot enjoy life is because their wages are low and because their families are large (page 372). Wages are low for reasons which the Professor clearly shows only five pages further on, where he speaks of the system—

"under which the majority must pay tribute to a minority for the privilege of living and working on those parts of the surface of the earth where labor is especially productive."

Professor Brown, throughout his work, clearly shows the fallacies of the socialists' arguments. The arguments in chapter six against the tariff are simply devastating.

"The tariff is a general grab, in which, so to speak, each citizen attempts to pick the pocket of others and has his own picked at the same time."

In a bitter passage, pages 50-51, Professor Brown shows the difficulties the trained student of economics encounters when he seeks to overcome the fallacies of the politician. Every word he writes is true, but it seems to me this discussion is hardly in place in a book on economics.

In calling attention to these few points in respect to which I differ with Professor Brown it is not my desire to give the impression that I do not endorse his book.

On the contrary, I consider it a most excellent piece of work, of which the professor may well be proud.

I recommend it highly to all who sincerely desire to learn what ails us, economically speaking. But I warn them that they must possess a mind capable of clear thinking and a determination to follow the truth wherever it leads, else they will get little or nothing from Professor Brown's work.

B. W. BURGER.

CORRESPONDENCE

APPROVES RALSTON'S PLAN

EDITOR LAND AND FREEDOM:

I wish to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation of *LAND AND FREEDOM*. I have been looking over again the last number, and feel how much we need just such a publication, more particularly

for the purpose of keeping us together, as well as for passing the magazine along to those not informed.

Mr. Jackson H. Ralston's plan to have carefully prepared constitutional amendments in states where such an idea seems feasible especially in Massachusetts, which will be submitted to the vote of the people for the purpose of bringing about tax reform, seems to me most practical. In connection with our publishing lecture and radio activity, this should impress people with the fact that we are determined to do something, and help to crystalize public opinion generally.

I particularly hope we can have a real get-together this fall, and put over some constructive plans.

Cambridge, Mass.

LOUIS F. WESTON.

FROM THE AUTHOR OF "WHAT'S WRONG WITH TAXATION"
EDITOR LAND AND FREEDOM:

I want to thank you for the very excellent review in the last number of *LAND AND FREEDOM*. Making all due and proper allowances for differences of opinion on matters collateral to the main argument, I feel more than pleased with the endorsement of *What's Wrong with Taxation*?

In the writing of this book I am trying to reach a public which so far has been cold to our presentations. We have so often become so impassioned as to be fairly inarticulate, and this has detracted from the efficacy of our work, at least in my opinion. If we would make progress it will prove necessary to revise our own usual attitude.

I shall watch with a certain confidence the reaction to the article urging Massachusetts to come forward. There are men and women enough in the state to start a valuable movement.

Palo Alto, Calif.

JACKSON H. RALSTON.

CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE

EDITOR LAND AND FREEDOM:

Enclosed please find my check for \$2.00 in payment of bill dated the 15th inst. just received for my subscription ending July—August 1931.

Will you please discontinue my subscription. I have given up hope and don't care a damn whether the world is reformed or not.

P. S.: I voted for Hoover.

Kansas City, Mo.

SAM L. CASEY.

A CORRECTION

EDITOR LAND AND FREEDOM:

Progress is unjustly pilloried in the *Commonweal*, March 21, p. (94) "The Truth About Java." It states

"In the January-February issue of *LAND AND FREEDOM* a paragraph appears about the island of Java. This same paragraph previously appeared in the *Fairhope Courier*, another American publication, which in turn, attributes its formation to *Progress*, an Australian journal. It runs as follows:—

"Java, a little island about as large as England, supports a population of 37,400,000, and has no unemployment menace. How do they do it? High tariff? Prohibition? Gold standard? Private operation of public utilities? Not a bit of it. Land speculation is forbidden. Land is treated as Government property, and is let on hereditary lease, or communal holdings."

"It is true (adds the 'C') that Java is almost exactly the same size as England, and that it has numerically an almost identical population. It is true also that there is very little unemployment in Java, *except amongst Europeans*. It is not, however, correct to say that the communal right to the land is established in Java, or that its economic rent is collected and used for communal purposes in place of taxation."

It then recounts quite a number of taxes.

From the foregoing your readers would conclude that *Progress* claimed the C. L. P. principles were operating in Java. No such misleading statement was made or implied by the writer. He was quite aware that Java had tariffs and other taxes.

The *Progress* article (Nov 1, 1930), in its reference to Java contained these words only:

"No room!" Those who say that shamefully disparage Australia. Why, our tiny neighbor—Java—about the size of England, but of