

## LAND & LIBERTY

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### THE ARMS RACE

Call it what we may, it is evident that another era of competition in armaments has commenced. In this country a new Ministry has been created for the purpose of expanding our preparations for war on a large scale and with the utmost rapidity. In other countries similar preparations are taking place. Yet the whole idea of war is abhorrent to the ordinary man. Is there one of us who would cast a vote for it if the question were put to him?

Preparations for war of such magnitude imply an acute apprehension of its imminence. Wars do not take place without causes. If governments believe that forces are at work which are likely to lead to war, it is their imperative duty to work for the removal of the causes and to build up armaments will certainly not do that. On the contrary it withdraws attention from the causes and increases the likelihood of conflict.

What are the causes? Partly perhaps the desire for prestige, the longing for power, or in blunt language a species of national vanity. But it may well be doubted whether this in itself is sufficient to determine any people to resort to war, unless it were backed up by other arguments. These other arguments are mainly economic. They are the plea of overpopulation, that certain countries are unable to provide from their own resources food and livelihood for their people, that access to raw materials is denied them, and that opportunity for emigration is lacking.

That genuine overpopulation need exist we entirely deny. The Malthusian theory sounded plausible a hundred years ago, but in the light of the facts of to-day it is nonsensical. The tide has turned in the other direction and the complaint now is of overproduction, crystallized in the paradoxical phrase that "we are poor because we produce too much."

If people are starving now it is not because Nature is niggardly, but because man-made institutions prevent men from availing themselves of the bounties of Nature. Even in the 'forties, when Irish peasants were starving, the corn that might have fed them was exported to pay the rent of English landlords. If people are starving to-day, is it not still in order to keep up rent for landlords? In this country the price of most important foodstuffs has been raised for this purpose. In France and Germany high tariffs are in some cases raising the price of food to double the world price.

Moreover, can any of these countries complain of overpopulation while there are great estates held by a small minority of the population, employing relatively few people and producing much less than could be produced by intensive cultivation in small farms?

That overpopulation is not the cause of poverty is self-evident when we compare one country with another. The need for expansion is claimed on behalf of Italy, Germany, and Japan. But Great Britain is much more densely populated than Germany. Is Britain overpopulated, and must we also strive for still more colonies as a remedy? Take on the other hand the United States where unemployment is rampant, but does anyone allege that the United States is overpopulated?

It is, therefore, clear that the first duty of every government is to take steps to secure the development of the natural resources of its own country, to give its people the opportunity of working them, and to ensure that their value is shared by all its inhabitants. The building of colossal armies, navies and air forces will do nothing to help in this. On the contrary it can only impose heavier burdens upon those who are suffering from the effects of present economic maladjustments, and increase the unrest that leads to war.

But it may be said that some countries are highly dependent upon raw materials which can only be obtained abroad. This is true, but true in greater or less degree of all countries. There is none which is not dependent for some of the raw materials of modern industry upon other countries. The first step is evidently to break down the tariff barriers which in many cases are preventing the purchase of materials in which a country is deficient, and which in all cases are accentuating the difficulty of international payment. Quotas and exchange restrictions must also go, for they are simply adding to the shortage of essential imports.

Nevertheless, it is not sufficient to remove the barriers upon trade, while the production of raw materials may be curtailed in the exporting countries and excessive prices demanded for them. We know that in fact the export of materials has in some cases been hindered by the imposition of export duties. In other cases restriction schemes have been instituted to curtail the supply and raise the price of commodities. Notable examples are tin, copper and rubber. Attempts have also been made at various times to control the supply of potash, nitrates, lead and other articles. Although the competition of substitutes or supplies from outside the combine have put a limit upon the increase in price, such schemes are clearly detrimental to the general interest not only of the countries which are deficient in such materials but of the majority of the people in the countries of supply. All such restrictions should be abolished.

Finally we come to the restriction of production by reason of denial of opportunity to exploit natural resources. In some cases monopolistic concessions have been granted, and in all cases the system of private land monopoly puts the power to control the use of natural resources in the hands of the fortunate few who are the owners of them.

The primary effect of this is to impoverish the mass of the people in the country concerned, but its secondary effect is to curtail the supply of raw materials for export.

The transfer of colonial possessions from one country to another will not put an end to this, for all countries (except Russia) in greater or less degree uphold the system of private monopoly of land.

The nations must be brought to realize that the world is economically one country. This need not detract from national independence. Each country may preserve the form of government which it prefers. But each must learn that in upholding a monopolistic regime, based upon monopoly of land and fortified by tariffs, quotas, and restrictions upon the production and exchange of commodities it is inflicting an injury

in major degree upon its own people and in lesser degree upon the peoples of all countries.

F. C. R. D.