

## LAND & LIBERTY

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### FREEDOM THE SOLUTION

FOR THE first time conscription has been put into effect in a period when the country is not at war. It has been enacted as a measure of diplomatic policy, so it is said, for the purpose of meeting a present emergency and as a sign that the nation is prepared to honour the obligations which it has undertaken. This is not the occasion to examine the twists and turns of our foreign policy during recent years, nor to enquire why such action is required as evidence that our pledges have been entered into in good faith. Whatever may be said in exoneration, the fact remains that for the first time the power to coerce and conscript men is made the instrument for effecting whatever purpose the Government of the day thinks good, and that it no longer relies upon an instinctive and voluntary realization of the justice of its aims for the support it may require.

It is said that this is only a small and temporary infringement of human liberty, but it is an infringement of a vital principle. Neither is it an isolated breach of the rights of the individual; it is of a piece with the many other attacks on liberty which characterize the age. During the century which elapsed after the French revolution a general progress was made towards political and economic freedom. The privileges of the small minority who controlled the destinies of nations were gradually taken away, and the right of the citizen through democratic means to decide his own destiny was slowly established. In the economic sphere the mobility of labour and capital increased. Millions of emigrants from Europe flowed to America and Australasia. A world-wide interchange of products and division of labour developed. The barriers to intercourse and commerce were lowered, and the transactions of a large part of the world were conducted by means of one medium of exchange.

In the last fifty years and especially in the last twenty-five years a halt has been called to this healthy development, and we have recently been moving with alarming speed in the opposite direction. The frontiers between nations have become more and more, not the boundaries between different local administrations, but barriers to the movement of people, to the transport of goods, and almost to the interchange of ideas. The concept of nationalism has been erected into a fetish before which all that is most worth while in human life is being sacrificed.

What are the causes of this strange retrogression? Broadly they are two: failure to investigate and delimit the economic and social spheres of the individual and of the State, and the power of selfish interests

to manipulate public opinion and to use the forms of democracy for their own ends.

The growing power of the common people was used to secure for them more and more political power, to break down the prohibitions upon the expression of opinion, to gain religious liberty, and to remove discriminations in favour of particular groups. It was used to abolish patronage in government and to put an end to the sinecures on which the poor relations of the governing classes were pensioned. It was used to reform the old municipal corporations and to establish municipal government upon a responsible and democratic basis. It was used to abolish tariffs, to enlarge the area of free competition and so to limit the extent to which some groups could exploit others.

These were all achievements in the direction of greater liberty, and they produced great results. Population and wealth increased rapidly. But there still remained grave inequalities in the distribution of wealth. The progress of society made those who worked to some extent better off, but it also made a small minority of non-workers enormously wealthy. Evidently there still remained something to accomplish. On the one hand there were those who by inertia, instinct or self-interest desired things to remain as they were; on the other, those who desired to remedy this gross inequality.

But what is the remedy? Is it to readjust the results of injustice after it has come into existence or is it to find the causes and to remove them? It is here that the failure to delimit the functions of the State and of the individual has had such disastrous consequences. The remedy has been sought in using the power of the State not to increase freedom but to increase restriction. The defenders of privilege have been quick to turn the discontent of the people to their own ends, to make them believe that the competition of foreigners is the cause of their impoverishment, and to induce them to look to restrictions upon trade and industry for the solution of their difficulties.

The result of such policies has been to interfere with the natural development of industry, to make every adjustment to changing economic conditions more difficult, and to accentuate depressions of trade and the variation in the volume of employment. This has led to the demand for more restrictions, for quotas, subsidies, tariffs and exchange equalization. So the vicious circle proceeds. With it has come a worsening of international relations; the measures which are taken by one nation for the "defence" of its economic position are to other nations an "attack" upon their trade and industry.

The attempt to "insulate" the trade of one country against economic changes in others has made the fluctuations in each more violent and disastrous. Can anyone doubt that if each state of the United States had practised the policy of regulation and isolation of its economy from its fellow states the economic condition of each would have been far worse than it actually is? These considerations are elementary and fundamental, but they are so little regarded as truisms that they must be repeated again and again with the greatest emphasis if any way of escape is to be found.

To say all this is not to say that the State has no functions. To secure freedom of action and equality

of opportunity demands positive action, and is not to be achieved by anarchy. The ingenuity of individuals will always be used to secure privileges for some unless unceasing vigilance is used to prevent it.

Moreover, freedom of exchange, although of enduring importance, and, it might be said, under existing conditions of paramount importance, is not the sole end to be sought. The relations between men are also governed by the property rights which are created and enforced by the State. Without property there can be no exchange, and the distribution of property conditions the distribution of wealth. Here again the conflict of extreme views obscures the real solution. Those who wish to preserve untouched all existing individual property evoke a reaction to the other extreme of wishing to vest all property in the State. It is true that the latter extreme is impossible, for articles of consumption must ultimately become the property of the consumers, and the most that the State can attempt to do is to prevent its citizens from exchanging them with each other so as to maximise the enjoyment which each individual can obtain.

The solution can only be found by relating the results of economic analysis to the concept of property, by recognising in the first place that besides the fruits of individual effort there are also the fruits of collective effort and co-operation. The latter register themselves in the value of land, the payment which must inevitably be made year after year for the privilege of enjoying a certain situation within the ambit of the community and of being able to avail one's self of the manifold advantages which flow from social life and co-operation. This value should form the revenue of society and not of individuals. Taking it for the equal benefit of all members of the community we can safely leave the use of land to individuals. Utilizing this natural source of revenue we can find the means of abolishing the tariffs and other taxes which prevent exchange and hamper industry.

In this way, and in this way only, can we find a synthesis which will reconcile the rights of the individual and the rights of the State and which will reconcile equality of opportunity with economic and political freedom.

F. C. R. D.

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## PALESTINE

In 1937 a Royal Commission reported in favour of the speedy termination of the Mandate for the administration of Palestine and for the setting up of two independent Jewish and Arab States between whom the major part of Palestine would be divided. Although this proposal was at first favoured by the Government, it was not proceeded with in the face of strong adverse criticism.

Disorders and disturbances have continued in Palestine, and the Government now propose to submit a new plan to the League of Nations, the main feature of which is that a defined maximum of Jewish immigration will be permitted for five years, and thereafter arrangements will be made at a date not specified to set up an independent administration on lines not clearly defined.

We need not pursue the discussion of whether contradictory and misleading promises were given to Jews and Arabs during the war period in order to enlist the support of both races. It seems clear, however, that the effect of the present proposals would be to terminate Jewish migration to Palestine when the new government is given power, for evidently the Arab majority would control it and the Arabs are bitterly opposed to an increase in the Jewish population. At a time when Jews are being forced in large numbers to leave their present homes, such a proposal must meet with strong opposition on humanitarian grounds. Many of the critics, however, support for their own country stringent restrictions upon the immigration of Jews and others. If the principle of an open door is applied to Palestine, it should be applied elsewhere.

The discussion in Parliament and in the Press has strangely ignored the fact that discontent in Palestine has steadily grown with the rapid increase in land values, which has made conditions more difficult for the landless population both Jews and Arabs, and there are many of both races who are landless.

In our issue of September, 1937, we made from the Report of the Royal Commission extensive quotations relating to the conditions of land tenure in Palestine, the extremely unequal distribution of land, the rapid growth of land values, and the heavy burdens of indirect taxation imposed upon the working population. If a real effort had been made by this country as the Mandatory Power to solve these troubles, and they could easily have been solved, economic conditions for the mass of the inhabitants of Palestine could have been enormously improved, and Jewish immigration would have become a benefit to all the inhabitants of the country and would have evoked no opposition except perhaps from the great land monopolists. Until the land question is solved there will be no peace in Palestine no matter what form of Government is adopted.

## SPAIN

We have been happy to hear from Sr Baldomero Argente, writing from his home in Madrid. Well in health, he follows with greatest interest the news received of activities in the Henry George movement throughout the world, but in Spain its forces are at present dispersed. He gives greeting to all in the desire that the world may enjoy peace and that the teaching of Christian economics, the Georgeist teaching, may illuminate people's minds on the causes which divide humanity and produce so many sorrows.