

# LAND & LIBERTY

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## ILLUSION AND REALITY

The tragic drama now being unfolded under our eyes in Spain is symbolical of a struggle which, under one form or another, is taking place throughout the world to-day. On its political side it is a contest between liberty and tyranny, on its economic side it is a struggle for a new and fairer division of the good things of this world. But these two things are but phases of one whole. He who works and has the product of his effort taken away from him is a slave in fact no matter by what name he may be called; and he who lives on the labour of others without working is a tyrant, no matter how much his privilege may be sanctioned by the forms of law.

It is this conflict which underlies all the other conflicts with which the world is tormented. The growing burden of armaments, the increasing tension in international relationships are but its symptoms. Those countries where authoritarianism has reached its height must close their frontiers against other countries. To protect the system of tyranny and exploitation which rules in them they must exclude democratic ideas, they must shut them out in print and they must shut them out when embodied in the persons of men. Where such ideas exist within the country, they must be suppressed, they must not be printed, those who hold them must be expelled, interned, or if need be killed, because such ideas are treasonous to the established order. But it is difficult to extinguish the desire for liberty among men. Force and more force is needed. Hence the need for larger standing armies for guns, tanks, bombs and aeroplanes, and all the devices by which human aspiration may be destroyed.

The greater the burden of armaments, the greater must be the burden of taxation. And this must be imposed not upon the beneficiaries of privilege but upon its victims. The means of securing this is indirect taxation. Thus tariff barriers must be raised. Butter and meat must disappear from the tables of the poor, their clothes must be taxed off their backs, in order that this monstrous system may continue. Moreover, protectionism strengthens monopoly and adds to the profits of its beneficiaries. It accords with that system under which the many must toil for the benefit of the few.

Nevertheless, such a policy must if possible be presented in a form which renders it tolerable, if not desirable, to its victims. The piling up of armaments is shown as a means of providing work for the poor who would otherwise starve. Tariffs must be represented as a means of preventing the foreigner from under-cutting or stealing the job of the native workman. Finally the whole thing must be elevated to a philosophy in which the sacrifices of the people are sanctified by a patriotic

glamour, and their deprivation is not for the benefit of a wealthy few but for that "brainless abstraction" called the State.

Let none of us think that these ideas are confined to foreign countries. In every country they have their advocates. In this country a profound transformation of the economic scene has taken place in the last five years. Protection which for more than two generations had been "dead and damned" is once more an established instrument of taxation and of economic policy, and it has been reinforced by an intricate network of restrictions, quotas, subsidies, and marketing schemes, the express and avowed purpose of which is to raise prices and to give "producers" a monopoly, and the ultimate effect of which is to diminish consumption and to raise rent.

In the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and elsewhere protectionism has been reinforced in like manner. But the darkest and most ominous factor is the reluctance of the democratic and progressive parties openly to challenge these disastrous policies. Instead of boldly attacking protectionism and advocating its immediate abolition, they temporise with the vested interests that are growing up, and content themselves with vague declarations in favour of greater freedom of trade, or delude themselves into the belief that somehow the machinery of quotas and marketing schemes can be made the instrument of raising wages and promoting the general welfare.

Super-imposed upon the basic monopoly of the land, vested interests are obtaining a hold upon every branch of economic life and are exercising an increasing influence upon the decisions of government. The Royal Commission on the Private Manufacture of Arms, for instance, says: "The extent to which Governments are using the manufacture of arms as a means of employing labour or curing unemployment, and their fear of the consequences if they demobilise this labour, is a new and very serious obstacle to the reduction of armaments." Fallacies of this kind cannot be too sternly combated. The manufacture of arms does not employ more labour, and does not add to the volume of wealth produced. At the best it diverts labour from other and more useful functions to this entirely unproductive one, and in the long run by reducing the supply of capital it diminishes the amount of this agent of production at the disposal of labour, and so diminishes wages and reduces the production of wealth. In the same way tariffs, quotas, and similar devices, divert labour from more productive to less productive employments, and so tend to lessen the production of wealth and bring about a general impoverishment of the workers.

And so with regard to the land question—lip service is paid to the idea of improving access to raw materials in colonial countries for the benefit of manufacturers in the more industrial countries. But the basic importance of land-ownership is ignored. It is the circumstances of ownership which ultimately determine how the land will be used, and who will profit by it. The enormous land values of London, Paris, Berlin and a hundred thousand smaller centres are a toll which is levied day after day upon their inhabitants for permission to labour. It is a factor far more important to the citizens of those countries than the development of the resources of colonial territories. "The ownership of land is the great fundamental fact which ultimately determines the social, the political, and consequently the intellectual and moral condition of a people. And it must be so. For land is the habitation of man, the storehouse upon which he must draw for all his needs, the material to which his labour must be applied for the satisfaction of all his desires; for even the products of the sea cannot be taken,

the light of the sun enjoyed, or any of the forces of nature utilized, without the use of land or its products. . . . Material progress cannot rid us of our dependence upon land; it can but add to the power of producing wealth from land; and hence, land is monopolised, it might go on to infinity without increasing wages or improving the condition of those who have but their labour. It can but add to the value of land and the power which its possession gives."

It is only upon the basis of a rational solution of the land question that the pressing social and international problems of our time can be solved. It is only by taking the value of land for public revenue that the burden of taxation imposed upon labour can be removed and the barriers erected between the free commercial intercourse of nations torn down. It is only by taking the value of land for public revenue, for the equal benefit of all citizens, that the exploitation by some others can be ended. It is only by making the land available on equal terms to all, that the opportunity can be given to all to earn a living for themselves in freedom and security, and the illusion destroyed that if men are not employed in making the munitions of war they can find no chance of working at useful occupations, or that tariffs are necessary to protect the British workman from the German, or the French from the Italian.

It is in this that the task of statesmanship is to be found, and only a clear recognition of the fundamental importance of the land question will lead the world out of its present turmoils.

F. C. R. D.

## THE LAND QUESTION IN SPAIN

Reference has been made in recent issues of *Land & Liberty* to the fact that the land question underlies the present struggle in Spain. We are indebted to *Bodenreform* for the following information (quoted from the weekly *Schule der Freiheit*, 1st July). While in the course of centuries the population increased and took new life in the towns the conditions of the middle ages continued unchanged in the country districts. The land belonged essentially to the grandees and the church, and was cultivated by propertyless labourers. The feudal lords attached no great importance to improving the production from their properties and the method of cultivation remained almost unchanged for hundreds of years. Taking large estates of 100 hectares and upwards in 1930 there were 23,500 large proprietors who owned about 67 per cent of the land. On the other hand there were five million people who had to live by agriculture, and who had diminutive holdings of about 1 hectare (2½ acres). The propertyless land-workers were forced into a state of dependency. The landowners could demand unheard of rents, and the tenants were entirely at their mercy.

Even in pre-war days the necessity of doing something was apparent. Large numbers were emigrating to South America but the government was unwilling to challenge the nobility and the church. In 11 years only 11,000 hectares were made available for settlement. General Primo de Rivera became dictator in 1923. He too saw that something ought to be done, but his land reform consisted in buying only land which the owners desired to sell. In the course of 7 years 21,500 hectares were acquired. The land-workers were naturally much disappointed and disillusioned and their opinions became more and more radical. This dissatisfaction burst out in 1931 and 1932 in revolutionary disturbances which led to the fall of the monarchy and the establishment of the Republic.

The subsequent history is told in an article by Prof. Tolo Bonorko of Madrid (*Bodenreform*, 10th May). The Agrarian Law of September, 1932, decreed the expropriation of all the great estates of feudal origin and of all properties exceeding 50 hectares, if irrigated, or exceeding 750 hectares, if not irrigated. In addition estates held for speculation or whose cultivation was neglected were liable to expropriation. The expropriation without compensation of the estates of the grandees appeared like a penalty for the participation of some of these old noble families in the Monarchist revolt of August, 1932. The Government of the Right in 1934 and 1935 paid compensation to the grandees or reversed the expropriation. One of the first decrees of the Azana government in February of this year was to forbid such payments to the grandees. The area of the estates belonging to the grandees was 573,000 hectares, or a full third of the land to be expropriated. The other landowners were compensated on the basis of their tax declarations with bonds redeemable in 50 years with interest at five per cent.

In the beginning of March, 1936, the workers and tenants flowed back to the settlements which had been given to them by the first Republican land reform and had been afterwards taken away from them during the period of Right Government. The administration hastened to legalize these frequently forcible happenings. It endeavoured to repair in a hurry the omissions of centuries. These precipitate measures evoked the counter-revolution, and the struggle for power by means of civil war.

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The following comes well from the London *Evening Standard*, the paper owned by Lord Beaverbrook. It was dated 30th July: "The roots of the present struggle go far back. They are in the soil of Spain. For years the Spanish landlords neglected their peasants, who are the poorest in the world. They left the administration of their estates to intendants, who fleeced the peasants. Then came the Revolution and an attempt at land reform by intellectual visionaries. The Republic's land reform has failed. There will be no peace in Spain until the land problem has been satisfactorily solved."

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The Conservative *Daily Telegraph* of 21st August allows Mr J. B. Firth in a special article to say: "Ferocity and fanaticism are frantic in combination, and this Spanish civil war is at one and the same time a war of political parties struggling for rival and irreconcilable forms of government, the agrarian war of a poverty-stricken and landless peasantry impatient to acquire the vast latifundia of the grandees and the Church, a bitter industrial war between Capital and Labour and, not least, a religious war."

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Another testimony in a Conservative paper, the *Glasgow Bulletin* of 28th August, is that of a Scotswoman newly returned after nine years in Spain, Mrs A. Scott, who, referring to Catalonia says: "Land there is too precious to be sold by the foot—it is paid for and cared for by the hands-breadth. The laws of land tenure are very complex, a man sometimes owning the vines, but not the soil they grow in. The landowner frequently exacts an exorbitant proportion of the harvest, good year or bad, without having put either money or work into it. Some families have worked the same land for generations, and only just not starved. "The land is for the men who work it" has become the slogan of the tenant *rabassaire*."