

AN ANALYSIS OF FREEDOM

President Eisenhower, at Williamsburg, on May 15th, emphasised the duty of modern educators to teach the value of the "founding documents" of the American Constitution. The Virginia Resolution of Independence, proclaimed at Williamsburg exactly 177 years before, was an unequivocal demand for equal rights to life, liberty and "the means of acquiring property." He said: "The true way to uproot Communism, is to understand what freedom means."

In his recent book, *Freedom—A New Analysis**, Maurice Cranston considers this question in detail. As Mr. Cranston has university qualifications and lectures on the B.B.C. his views should reflect what intellectual authority has to offer as a solution for a grave weakness in democratic social philosophy. Bertrand de Jouvenel in the *Manchester Guardian*, May 19, acclaims the present work as a prelude to "a great book which Mr. Cranston obviously can write and presumably will write."

To most people, including compilers of popular dictionaries, freedom is not an abstruse conception. It is simply the absence of constraint. Remove a weight from a spring and it expands; open the door of a cage and the bird flies away; repeal laws which restrict production and exchange, and men produce and exchange goods in accordance with their powers of intelligence and industry. Freedom is the original or natural condition; when restriction is applied, freedom ceases. However Rousseau may have erred in his deductions he affirmed a literal fact when he said, "Man is born free." This is evidently the point at which we must begin investigating the subject of freedom so far as it concerns human beings. We must consider the natural environment into which all men are born and the natural resources to which they must apply their powers of mind and body if they are to sustain life and rise to the opportunities life offers. If men have not freedom in these essentials, freedom in secondary spheres cannot be real.

Mr. Cranston introduces his analysis with the quotation, "The purpose of philosophy is clarification," but this does not lead him to begin by examining the meaning of freedom as generally understood. His first concern is with "our habit of saying we are free when we are without something we are glad to be without" which "prompts us to agree with workers who tell us freedom is good." "This," he says, "is misleading, for there is no *one* freedom, but many freedoms, and they are as various as are constraints, impediments and burdens." This line of approach does not clarify the subject. Such words as peace and war, still and moving, dead and alive, all describe mutually excluding conditions. It is never contended that there are different kinds of "peaces," or "stillnesses" because there are different kinds of war and movement.

In the first section of the book entitled "The Meaning of Freedom" the author does not build up evidence to establish a true conception of the essential meaning of the word. Instead he discusses the various ways in which it has been used, such as its "emotive meaning," its qualities as a "bro-word" and a "hurrah-word," its "stipulative" "rational" and "compulsory rational" definitions and its "participations in the revelation of what-is-as-such." After 62 pages of dissertation the reader is left without any conception of the author's own conclusions, unless it is that freedom means nothing. "The word 'free' has no

uniquely descriptive meaning," he says. If a word does not describe anything at all, or if its purpose has been exactly forestalled by another word, then an author's time can be better employed than by writing books about it.

The second section, devoted to the "Ambiguities of Liberalism," consists of four chapters illustrating the uses of that word in England, France, Germany and America, respectively. Some useful information is given to show how hopelessly misleading it has now become to use the term "liberal" in either national or international discussions. But Mr. Cranston gives us no indication how the word *should* be used. From the facts he gives it is evident that one important source of confusion has been the failure of Liberals to distinguish between the sphere of personal rights or natural opportunities on the one hand and the domain of political power on the other; between the question of the right to one's self and the question of power over others. It is with the former only that freedom or liberty is directly concerned. Mr. Cranston does not point out this prime source of error and he never systematically examines the question of freedom in relation to natural opportunity, although he chooses to describe as a "Romantic" notion any concern with that aspect of the subject.

"The Romantic," says Mr. Cranston, "looks backward. If there is servitude to nature, where there are no advanced political institutions, such servitude," he argues, "is at least natural." On the other hand, the "Progressive" demands "freedom from the constraints of nature" which "has been achieved, where it has been achieved, in exchange for the constraints of advanced political institutions—policemen, compulsory education and the Welfare State." This conflict between the "Progressive" and "Romantic" conceptions of freedom does not disturb Mr. Cranston; it is merely a failure in each case to specify "freedom from what."

If freedom means absence of constraint, to talk of "servitude to nature" or "freedom from the constraints of nature" is as absurd as talking of "servitude to freedom" or "freedom from the constraints of freedom." Each man is born with certain natural powers. These powers are limited, but in the original or natural condition they cannot be restricted. If a man's natural powers enable him to lift a certain weight and no more, then he cannot be *restricted* from lifting more; it is impossible to restrict what does not exist. An author who talks of "servitude to nature" without pointing out the fallacies involved forfeits his claims to clarify the subject of freedom.

The purpose of words is to communicate ideas and feelings between one person and another. If words never had the same meaning to one person as to another, no human intercourse would be possible. The stupendous progress of physical science has grown from a common understanding of clearly defined words; the stagnation, if not retrogression of social science has been accompanied by a tendency towards clumsy and ambiguous use of words. To suggest, as Mr. Cranston's book suggests, that men may be left to put whatever construction they like on the meaning of freedom, serves no purpose except to lead social controversy into barren fields.

In the days of Rousseau the people as a whole had unbounded faith in freedom which they thought would bring them property. But what has been called freedom has not brought the diffusion of property and the independ-

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ence men expected. The relation of freedom to property is probably the most urgent aspect to-day, but Mr. Cranston does not examine it. He mentions Locke's doctrine of the duty of governments to ensure security of "life, liberty and property," but this is only quoted as an example of "the doctrine of the minimal state." The doctrine is labelled, not analysed.

The relation of freedom to property can be understood only by considering the essential conditions of human life: that all property is produced by labour applied to natural substances and forces. This is neither "backward" nor "progressive" nor "romantic"—it is simply looking at conditions as they exist to-day universally. It is obvious

that a society which fails to ensure equal freedom to occupy space on the earth's surface and to make use of its resources, fails to apply the principle of freedom where it is most essential. Under our laws, land has through successive stages become absolute private property, while at the same time, by growth of population and the arts of production, the value of land has increased in proportion. The effects upon the distribution of all property of this private property in land values is obvious. Any social philosopher who fails to point out this essential defect in our so-called free society fails in his duty as defined by President Eisenhower.

F. D. P.

OPPONENTS OF PURCHASE TAX VOTE FOR ITS CONTINUANCE

In his Budget speech, Mr. Butler—Chancellor of the Exchequer who regards "all taxes as bad"—proposed that Purchase Tax should be reimposed for the next twelve months at three-quarters the rates levied last year. Henceforth purchasers of taxable goods would be subject to a levy of 25, 50 or 75 per cent.

During the Committee stage of the Finance Bill the Opposition tabled amendments designed to reduce the two lower categories to 16½ and 45 per cent respectively. The amendments, taken together and moved by Mr. ANTHONY GREENWOOD, were considered June 10.

Members from both sides of the Committee condemned the tax, graphically describing its evil effects and manifold absurdities and injustices. Nobody had a good word to say for it. After four hours debate the Committee divided, Members trooping loyally into the lobbies to vote on party lines in favour of imposing the tax they all decried at either 25 and 50 per cent or at 16½ and 45 per cent.

The amendments were defeated, 267 to 249, and Members resumed their seats and their protestations against taxing purchases during the ensuing consideration of an amendment to reduce the 75 per cent tax to 66½ per cent, moved by Sir EDWARD BOYLE, Conservative Member for Birmingham, Handsworth.

We quote the following from the speeches made during the debate on the first two amendments drawing attention particularly to the significant contribution made by the Liberal Member for Orkney and Shetland, Mr. GRIMOND. So long as it is accepted that Government has a duty merely to ameliorate poverty—leaving undisturbed the entrenched privilege which causes this unnatural and fear-some condition—by providing people with services which they could and should provide for themselves, legislators will continue to levy purchase and other taxes more or less equally vexatious and harmful.

Moving the Opposition amendment, Mr. ANTHONY GREENWOOD (Lab., Rossendale) said: "We are making some slight progress in dollar markets, but there a factor of uncertainty has been introduced by the United States tariff policy and also by the fact that Purchase Tax militates against the production of better-class cloth. The position at home is a precarious one and in the overseas markets we have to depend increasingly upon the better quality cloths and garments which we produce, and it is there that Purchase Tax is having a thoroughly unhealthy effect.

"It is too often assumed that the main argument against Purchase Tax is that it discourages the public from buying. Much more serious is the effect upon the retailers, upon whom the even flow of trade largely depends. Retailers are unwilling to lay in stocks of goods upon which they will have to pay heavy taxes, because they know that if there is a substantial reduction in taxation they are left with a serious loss upon their hands. They

tend to place their orders upon a hand-to-mouth basis. In their turn manufacturers are reluctant to develop new lines of cloth or new designs of garments. Unfortunately, this uncertainty continues throughout the year because, of course, the Chancellor at any time of the year can vary Purchase Tax by an order laid before the House."

"No one dislikes the Purchase Tax more than I do. I think it is easily the worst of all taxes, and its influence upon trade, design and quality is damaging to every industry it effects.—MR. WILLIAM SHEPHERD (Cons., Cheadle).

"There are only two justifications for indirect taxation. One is that it has a sumptuary purpose and is meant to check consumption; the other is that it is convenient politically for the Chancellor to raise revenue without the people noticing at the time that he is raising revenue.

"A man who smokes five ounces of tobacco a week pays 20s., and of that probably 16s. is tax. He is not very keenly aware of that when making his purchases, but if an extra 16s. were deducted from his pay packet at the end of the week for additional Income Tax he would be very much aware of it and would be deeply resentful.

"Neither of these two reasons for indirect taxation can possibly apply to taxation upon school requisites. We do not want to discourage the consumption of school requisites. Nevertheless, something like 60 articles that are required in school are subject to Purchase Tax at the new rate of 25 per cent. They include copy books, exercise books, writing books of all kinds, needle-work material, pictures and diagrams, and even the harmless but necessary chalk. It is estimated that last year something like £1 million was paid by local authorities in Purchase Tax on school requisites, of which from 60 to 70 per cent is returned in the form of grant from the Treasury to the local authorities. The Treasury takes with the one hand and gives back with the other hand, and this does not seem to be a very clever method of raising revenue."—MR. RALPH MORLEY (Lab., Ichen).

"There must be taxes to pay for the social services we want, but this is a bad tax. It was introduced as a temporary tax; it is hitting quality goods industries which are vital to this country."—MR. JOSEPH GRIMOND (Liberal, Orkney and Shetland).

"We on this side of the Committee want to get rid of Purchase Tax—that is our ambition—or at all events bring it down to a very low level. We dislike it intensely. At every turn we find trade and industry and the general well-being of the community hampered by excessive taxation."—MR. RALPH ASSHETON (Cons., Blackburn).

"It may be difficult to calculate the course of supply and demand—though upon such calculations the success of a business may very often depend—but that is child's play compared with trying to fathom the inscrutability of the Chancellor's mind regarding Purchase Tax. Even when he grants a concession so many people possess stock on which they have paid tax that they are driven to a state of near bankruptcy by reason of it.

"I am sure everyone would agree that ladies find their handbags indispensable, yet they have to pay 50 per cent Purchase Tax on them. Unless we have a paper bag conception of how people