

LAND &

LIBERTY

SEPTEMBER & OCTOBER, 1976



Man, Proud Man

A RECURRING theme among commentators writing about the Great Drought of '76 was that while the Government could take action to conserve as much water as possible, it could do absolutely nothing about ending the drought, which arose from the immutable laws of nature. In fact, the Government argued this itself.

Now this is simply shrugging off responsibility. Since when have governments not taken strong action against the laws of nature when they have failed us?

Ever since it was "discovered"

that the natural laws of the free market (blind economic forces) were responsible for unemployment, slums, poverty and the maldistribution of wealth in our society, governments have taken firm action to legislate against these laws. Industries have been nationalised, subsidised, re-organised, directed, controlled, threatened, cajoled and generally knocked into shape and remoulded nearer the government's desire — with crippling taxation as an incentive.

Nature, of course, did not take this lying down. Reacting against

it (and against land speculation with its under-use and mis-use of nature's resources), it answered with unemployment. Not deterred, government replied by debasing the currency so as to increase the demand for labour. And money flowed freely from the printing presses. Nature countered with rising prices. Not in the least dismayed, government came back with price controls. And when labour demanded higher wages because price controls were not working (all in obedience to nature's laws) government pro-

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ceeded to hold down wages. To confuse the laws of economics, this was introduced under various guises. First, a "pay pause", then a "declaration of intent", then a "wage freeze" which was quickly superseded by an "incomes policy" and "social contract".

Meanwhile, government-sponsored inflation began to provoke other ripostes from Mother Nature — the value of the pound fell externally as well as internally. Rushing in where nature fears to tread, government promptly fixed exchange rates.

Nature had the last word in this, however, by forcing a devaluation and her own floating level for the pound. When this began to work, government claimed the credit and took it as licence to print more money. But nature hit back and floated the pound lower.

The fact that the policy of "full employment" has produced more evils than it set out to cure, and has in fact now come full circle with persistent inflation and persistent unemployment hand in hand, need not lead us to despair nor to capitulate to the laws of economics. Nor need we worry that we still have a "land question" that is making no small contribution to root unemployment. That all land legislation has failed to affect land use except in the wrong way, is true, but more policies are on the way to save us when the latest Act goes the way of its predecessors. Economic miracles are also on the way as we are being constantly reminded by government. If only these confounded economic laws would get out of the way.

"Cast nature out with a pitchfork and she will return again," says a Latin tag. But that is to reckon without the State. Cast out legislation that is illogical, unfair, unnatural, penalising, paralysing, idiotic and downright criminal



and it will return again in another government.

The drought? It should have

been child's play to have legislated against it before it took place. As it was, it took the prayers of Sikhs and Jews (and maybe a few Christians) to bring it to an end. And then of course there was always witchcraft with which to best Mother Nature. The Government is simply not trying hard enough.

* * *

OPPRESSIVE FREE MARKET?

WITH a few exceptions, which include the *Daily Telegraph*, *Financial Times* and *The Spectator*, it is not done in British journalism to give unqualified praise to the free market — and even in the papers mentioned, qualifications do sometimes appear.

The Guardian, a "middle-of-the-road" or "liberal" newspaper is among those who seem unable to mention the free market (if they mention it at all) without apologising for it. It was refreshing therefore (at first) to read an article in it (August 21) by that excellent writer-economist Francis Cairncross singing the praises of market forces.

"It is extremely difficult to explain to those who have grown up to admire and cherish these reforms (welfare state services) that it may be possible to care just as much about redistributing income — and yet to want to see more sharing by price and less by queuing."

Francis Cairncross then goes on to argue for an economic price for council houses and other now free or subsidised services which would reduce the need for bureaucrats and lift the constraints on freedom of choice "from which the poor suffer more than the rest of us." But then comes this remarkable sentence: "There is nothing to which the post-war generation of the Left in Britain are as blind as the fact that the forces of the market can be used to keep and to liberate the badly off as well as to oppress them."

Now the free market is a neutral mechanism which allows free choice and voluntary exchange. It is non-coercive. It enables the exchange of what a man desires least for what he desires most. It deprives him of nothing, it is not responsible for the state of his health or his pocket. The bigger the market, the bigger the choice

and the bigger the choice the bigger the bargain. No matter in what way a man is oppressed or deprived of his proper share of what he has produced or how much he is robbed on his journey to and from the market, the market itself is blameless and cannot oppress.

Did Francis Cairncross make a careless statement or was she throwing a sop to the Left in order to make her point more acceptable? The latter we think. If so, it is a dangerous game. The only other explanation is that in some vague way she is accepting the distortions of the market by monopolies, protection and state intervention as part of the market itself instead of a violation of it.

* * *

SOCIALISM, COMMUNISM, "FREE" SOCIETIES AND FREEDOM

TO many people socialism differs from communism only in a matter of degree and method, the basic philosophies being the same.

A deeper distinction, however, is emphasised by Francois Revel, one of France's leading socialist writers. His latest book* was reviewed in the *Daily Telegraph*, August 25, where Revel is quoted as saying "The principle obstacle to socialism is not capitalism but communism."

The difference between socialist ideals and communist totalitarianism is that the ideals of liberty, democracy and social justice have been all but extinguished in the latter, he argues.

Revel's attack on communism is such as would be (and is) made by humanitarian liberals and "right-wing" philosophers. He appears to pull no punches and attacks also the fellow-travelling and appeasement-loving leftists for their blindness and romanticism.

Says the reviewer: "In view of the fact that Revel has written a courageous and lucid work, it is a pity that one has to take issue with his failure to perceive the authoritarian dangers lurking in his brand of social democracy. In common with most upholders of the "mixed economy" and a heavily redistributive tax system, Revel ignores the potential threat

**La Tentation Totalitaire*

to liberty posed by government "welfare" monopolies, yet it is precisely this form of collectivism, superficially benevolent, that is perhaps the greatest threat to the future of free societies."

However, the "free societies" are under attack simply because they are not really free but riddled with legalised privilege which allows the bulk of the value of the natural heritage—the land—to be appropriated by a minority and oppressive taxation levied on labour and capital to make good the missing revenue. Add to this the protection and subventions granted to powerful interests and the slavery of the Common Agricultural Policy of the EEC and we can see just how free our society is.

The battle is indeed between freedom and coercion but we need to know the true nature of freedom before we can successfully defend it.

* * *

SUPERFICIAL LAND REFORM

THE deadline for the completion of India's much-heralded land reform was August 1. Little has been achieved to improve the lot of the country's fifty million landless villagers.

The reform consisted of setting a ceiling upon the permitted size of landholding of any individual and the redistribution by the government of the "surplus land" thus revealed. Four million acres of surplus land were confidently expected by Chief Ministers but only two-and-a-half million acres have actually been declared surplus, according to a recent report in the *Guardian*.

Only a million-and-a-half acres are in government hands of which only one third has been allotted to those to whom it had been promised.

This reflects not only the inefficiency of the bureaucracy, but also the stranglehold which the landlords have on both the political and administrative power structure, says the *Guardian* reporter.

Village records are falsified, land is held in the names of non-existent relatives or domestic pets, delays are introduced by recourse to the courts, while the landless helplessly look on.