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|   | PAGE |   | PAGE |
|---|------|---|------|
| Chances for European Recovery ... ..    | 2    | G. Bernard Shaw and Henry George ... .. | 7    |
| Trade Controlled and Trade Free ... ..  | 3    | China's Weakness Our Weakness ... ..    | 8    |
| Seventh International Conference ... .. | 5    | Transport and Other Monopolies ... ..   | 9    |
| Operation of a Disastrous Act ... ..    | 6    | Parliamentary Quiz ... ..               | 11   |

## United Nations and Human Rights

TIME was when to the call of the Rights of Man the half-trained, ragged soldiers of the French Republic carried the hope of mankind over the Alps down to Italy and into every generous heart in the civilised world. "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive," sang Wordsworth, "But to be young was very heaven."

It is like a cold douche to turn from Wordsworth, Hazlitt and Shelley, or the Lamartine of 1848, to the reception accorded the *Charter of Human Rights* adopted just before Christmas, 1948, by the Assembly of the United Nations. Only one newspaper, the *Manchester Guardian*, troubled to print the text in full. It seems that the mass of men no longer feel confidence in human rights and, therefore, have little interest in the subject. But for anyone who still cherishes some conception of the dignity of the human spirit this is an added incentive to study the document in the hope that it may shed some light on the causes or false conceptions which have led mankind in general to distrust even their own consciences, minds and powers. After all, no compilation could be more representative of world opinion on the subject, and the statement is too lengthy to escape divulging some particular trends. "It makes claims and enunciates dogmas which are by no means self-evident to the human mind or human conscience," says the *Church Times*, December 17th. "What is the intellectual basis for its assertions?"

Such a declaration, to have any force, must accord with a "right" as it exists in the mind of every intelligent person. Here, if anywhere, it must be logical. A right is negative not positive, it is not a duty, and rights are concerned with duties only in so far as it is one's duty *not* to commit any positive act infringing the rights of another. A right can never compel anyone to *do* anything, for positive compulsion must always infringe rights; and two rights cannot conflict. The first sentence of Article 1 of the Declaration: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights," clearly accords with this definition, and so with many other subsequent passages, *e.g.*:—

"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

"No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home, or correspondence."

"Everyone has the right to own property."

"No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property."

"No one may be compelled to belong to an association."

"Everyone has the right to work."

## Qualified Freedoms

All the foregoing accord with the negative conception of "right," and with the definition, in every reputable dictionary of "freedom" as "the state of condition of being free." They might all be summarised by a declaration that "Everyone has the right not to be interfered with."

In other parts of the Declaration, however, we find, *e.g.*, "Everyone is entitled to all the . . . freedoms set forth in this Declaration." "Everyone has the right to social security," etc. "Everyone has the right to favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment." "Everyone has the right to equal pay for equal work . . . to favourable remuneration, supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection." "Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay." "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing," etc. "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free. . . . Elementary education shall be compulsory." "In the exercise of his rights and freedoms everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined for the purpose of securing the general welfare in a democratic society." (Italics in the above are ours.)

## A Perverted Charter

One can see that the above all conflict with and make absurd the previous declarations we have cited. To pluralise the word "freedom" makes nonsense of its essential meaning. There cannot be two different entities of the same abstraction, although there may be an infinite number of its applications. The "right" to be employed implies *compulsion* on someone to employ you; but if such rights are equal he must have an equal "right" to compel you to employ him. And the same absurdity occurs in the alleged "rights" to social security, pay, holidays, standard of living, etc. Moreover, the extent of these various rights—qualified as "adequate," "reasonable," "welfare," etc., plainly implies the existence of some compulsory power in whom the interpretation shall rest. But how can a right imply positive compulsion? And what is the use of "defining" a right as something which somebody else must define? If the right of one man implies the right to take something from another how can anyone claim the right to own property? To say that education shall be free and compulsory is a fitting

illustration of the effect of the "free and compulsory" schooling the compilers have evidently enjoyed.

This Charter is not a vindication of human rights; it looks much more like an attempt by those in authority to justify their perversion. Perhaps the best that can be said is that it evinces that tribute of hypocrisy which vice pays to virtue, error to truth. Such widely-held absurdities, however, are not accepted without cause, and no authoritative document could tell us the reason more plainly than this. On examination, every one of its inconsistencies and evasions will be found to spring from the *fear of poverty*.

### The Riddle of the Sphinx

Under conditions of what was called freedom the masses found there was no escape from poverty and destitution. After long-sustained hopes, struggles, aspirations and sufferings they at last capitulated to dependence upon the State, with its power to apply compulsion and distribute relief. And the prevaricating demagogues and middle-headed paternalists saw their opportunity to reach power, or were carried into it, by the force of question begging phrases and misuse of terms. But these in themselves show that the masses have not even yet followed the grey road into serfdom without many long, lingering looks behind into the sunshine of freedom they have never known in their lives but cherish instinctively in their hearts.

This shows us there is still hope.

"The association of poverty with progress is the great enigma of our times. It is the riddle which the Sphinx of Fate puts to our civilisation and which not to answer is to be destroyed." Thus Henry George seventy years ago. These words still hold good; and so does the answer he gave.

### Our Modern Collectivists

Any declaration of specific human rights which omits all reference to every man's equal right to the earth and its resources, overlooks the first condition on which all other rights depend. On this indispensable condition the *Charter* is silent.

The modern collectivists, the latest exponents of the eternal will-to-power, seem to be winning all along the line. The ambitious flock to enrol under their standard, the agents of old as well as new privilege seek their alliance, the Conservative instinct of compounding with power, of avoiding too close an enquiry into the causes of injustice, admirably suits their purpose. But their victory is superficial; they gain the votes and shouts of the multitude, but not their hearts.

Human nature can be perverted but it cannot be inherently changed. In his heart of hearts every man despises himself for depending on others, and not on himself. In Rousseau's day the cry was "Man is born free, yet he is everywhere in chains!" The early martyrs of the Revolution sought to strike off the chains, not disguise them; and such martyrs will arise again because, despite all maternity benefits, children's allowances and "free and compulsory" State schooling, men and women are still *born free*. The generous fire in the heart, the clear eyes to see the degradation of mankind and its cause—these things will always escape the scrutiny and control of official snoopers, even in a State clinic. Even to-day, among some of the younger generation, there is a tendency for State worship to become old-fashioned.

The Physiocrat, Dupont de Nemours, hunted by the emissaries of power, and shortly before his arrest, wrote these words: "Even on the fatal tumbril, with nothing left free but my voice, I would still be able to cry, Beware! to a child coming too close to the wheel; he might owe his life to me; perhaps the country would one day owe his salvation to him."

### European Recovery

By the middle of November last the Council of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation had planned to send for consideration by the United States Congress a detailed statement of an agreed and concerted plan for the administration to the nineteen countries concerned of the enormous though indefinite sum by aid of which (so it is planned) the European governments are to be self-supporting by 1953. The first plan, however, did not work out. The report was not ready. The governments were not even ready with their individual plans. Instead, a considerable shock to American opinion was registered when it was realised that the Joint Anglo-American Council on Production was not to be allowed to investigate the efficiency of Britain's nationalised industries. Sir Stafford Cripps, however, used the occasion to review British production and tell his planees, "We must do better than this." What the planees said is not recorded. Some competent leaders of industry differed sharply, however, about the quantity of British machinery which Sir Stafford was diverting from the home market to the export drive. Failing the only criterion, *i.e.*, a free market, we do not see how either side could claim to know where effort could be most economically expended.

By the end of November an ancillary committee of the O.E.E.C., reporting to Congress, expressed disappointment with the failure of European governments to realise the urgency of "economic unification," and shortly afterwards these governments issued explanations—quite incompatible with each other—and mutual recriminations. American "pressure" on Great Britain to lower its export price of coal added another note to the chorus, and this was followed by a falsetto from Clacton where, at an International Socialist Conference, the Labour Party—presumably in a position to plan the British Government's plans—joined in a resolution aimed at international Socialist control of basic industries, without any reference to the O.E.E.C., of course. Soon afterwards, Mr. Bevin issued an abrupt warning to France that the austerity of British living-plans did not allow for the importation of "luxuries" the French had planned to send us; although the British Government's plans included the export of whisky, fine linen, high quality textiles, etc.

Meanwhile, an interesting side issue had developed with the Argentine, where, following another "agreement" between governments, more "pressure" was being brought on Signor Miranda to expedite delayed deliveries of meat.

### Planned Exasperation

Just about the time when ordinary people began to think about Christmas cards, the American Minister in charge of the British section of the Economic Co-operation Administration reported "on information given him by Sir Stafford Cripps" that Britain was using aid dollars to buy crude aluminium in U.S.A., while at the same time exporting aluminium scrap to that country. This was hotly denied, but the discrepancy between the figures of