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Editor: A. W. Madsen

Associate Editor: F. C. R. Douglas

34 KNIGHTRIDER STREET, LONDON, E.C.4

Telegrams:
"Eulav, Cent, London"

Telephone:
City 6701

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PREPARING FOR PEACE

THE UNION of Democratic Control has issued a manifesto asking us to think seriously now about Peace and the War. It is claimed that "past failure" (however much or little that includes) is due to the fact that "when Britain and France had the power, they attempted to maintain an outworn economic system and conditions of international anarchy which provided Hitler with the opportunity of attempting to procure what he has called since 'the consolidation of Europe' by enslaving the European peoples under German rule." This claim is neither clear nor convincing.

What is "outworn" in the economic system? Is it some particular part or parts, or is it like "The One Horse Shay," all at once and nothing first? How long has it been outworn or was it ever right? If Britain and France prevented Germany from establishing a new and better economic system, how and when did they do so?

What is meant by "conditions of international anarchy"? Is it the national liberty of separate States, or is it disloyalty to the League of Nations, or have the words any definite meaning at all?

We are told that "Nazism and Fascism, as internal systems, can be destroyed only by the German and Italian peoples themselves" and that "our task is to produce the conditions which will break the hold of these regimes on the minds of the peoples they now hold in thrall."

What are these conditions? Can we produce them before the minds of the German and Italian peoples are enlightened? How are we going to enlighten the minds of these peoples otherwise than by example? And, most important of all, who is going to enlighten the people of Britain, to bring us truth and unity, so that we may be able to enlighten other peoples by putting our own affairs in order?

We need something more intelligible than the assertions that have been made.

It is urged that there should be "a statement of principles on which we are prepared to conclude peace with the German and Italian peoples" after the defeat of the dictators; and the principles adumbrated involve the abolition of "Sovereign States and private capitalism" which "are obsolete" and "change to collectivist economy which necessarily puts far greater power into the control of the State."

As there cannot be much greater power put into the control of the State in Germany or in Italy than they have had for some years, this idea of principles can only mean that we promise to put "far greater power into the control of the State" in Britain. Such State control could be imposed and maintained only by force, and we are not all yet agreed to have such control imposed on us after the war ends.

Again, what is meant by "private capitalism"?

Is the intention to abolish individual ownership of capital altogether? In this "collectivist economy which necessarily puts far more power into the control of the State" how much in the matter of rights is to be secured to the individual and how far may the State go in restraining individual liberty? What is the essential difference between this collectivist economy and the collectivist economics of Nazism, Fascism and Communism? In abolishing the "obsolete" Sovereign States, how much power to control them is to be claimed by the Super State?

If we "must think of society as one whole," and the Super State must apply "common principles of economic and social policy to the populations" of all the controlled States, how much, if any, national liberty can be retained by any controlled State?

It is essential, we are told, to apply the democratic method and that the Super State "must guarantee democratic government." But given a Federation of European States—Britain, Germany, Italy, Russia, etc.—governed under the most perfect democratic method ever devised, what would be the proportion of British representatives to the whole number on the Governing Council? How far could British opinion and British representation influence decisions affecting individual liberty and economic prosperity in Britain?

No answer is provided by the declaration that the Super State is to have much power over the controlled State, and the controlled State is to have "far greater power in control" over the individual; and at the same time and by the same policy, the opportunity for free individual development "must be maintained and strengthened." This is incompatible and absurd.

Under such power of control at the centre with the general ignorance of elected representatives about opinions and conditions outside their own localities, and therefore with a multitude of conflicting opinions, local or national opinions could have little influence. National legislatures and democratic methods would become ineffective and farcical.

With equal liberty an individual having the necessary knowledge can change his policy for his own benefit, and other individuals may learn from his experience. But when one individual is so bound to another that all can do nothing except by joint action, the individual who first acquires the necessary knowledge is prevented from taking what would be correct action. Knowledge is coupled to ignorance; and the greater the number that must take collective action, and the more extensive its application, the greater must be the difficulty in procuring voluntary agreement to change of policy. Hence the recourse to organised force—Nazism, Fascism, Communism, Collectivist dictatorship by any name, which eventually must try to camouflage its incompetence by war.

Democracy can be effective, democratic control a reality, only when State control is at a minimum and individual liberty at the maximum—equal liberty for all.

We do need to seek the truth and think seriously, but a Party, a State or a Federation of States cannot do that. Only the individual can investigate and think. But to think and get others to think is the duty of every one.

Our economic system should be examined to discover how far it is the operation of immutable natural law, and how far parasitic excrescences have been grafted on it by the action of some individuals using State control to legalise their particular forms of aggression and to restrict the liberty of other individuals in producing a living for themselves.

Peace is not an artificial condition instituted by men;

it is the natural state in which men work to get a living, which exists by the will of the Creator, and continues until it is disturbed by aggression—generally some method of getting the products of labour without rendering equitable service in exchange. And war is only aggression extended to a particular stage according to the “power in control of the State” dominated by aggressors.

Let us abolish the whole system of aggression at

home, and internal peace will naturally follow. The effect on our own condition would do more to influence other peoples than a mere statement of principles which might or might not be acted on later.

Aggression is the enemy. Such co-operation as can prevent aggression is the first sort of State Federation required. With peace and goodwill such further co-operation will naturally follow as can be agreed upon.

J. H. McG.

NEGLECTED ASPECTS OF THE FOOD PROBLEM

By D. J. J. Owen

Two of the most notable recent contributions to the discussion of food production are those by Sir John Boyd Orr entitled “Food and the Ordinary Man,” in *Chambers Journal*, November, 1940; and by Sir R. George Stapledon on “A Lands Commission” in the *New Statesman and Nation*, 9th November. When we look for the definite proposals of these authorities they have a familiar shape. Rationing, price-fixing, subsidies, commissions; nothing apparently more original than these oft tried specifics.

Sir John Orr says: “Rationing helps, but there still remains the question of price,” that is, as a means to ensure an equitable distribution of the most health-giving dietary. “The most economical method of feeding the nation would be to subsidize the six basal foods which taken together can provide a diet adequate for health.” “In peace-time,” says this writer, “the farmer produced what gave the maximum profit. In war, he must produce what will give the maximum yield of food per acre, and prices for the different agricultural products must be adjusted so that it is more profitable to produce the foods we urgently need than those we can dispense with in the present emergency.”

Here there is the vulgar notion that there is something wicked in producing what gives maximum profit, and a failure to see that given fair and open marketing conditions, without monopolies or restrictions to exchange, this profit motive would hurt no one, and even in war-time would be a better incentive to the most economical production than arbitrary and bureaucratic price-fixing and subsidies. Further, it is not explained how the adjusted price is to be justified as between the producer and the consumer. The same people, either as consumers or as taxpayers will have to pay extra in the long run.

Sir John Orr objects to going back to a peace-time food policy based on trade interests. “We will never again impose quotas or other restrictions on production or imports to bring about an artificial scarcity to keep up prices.” We hope Sir John is a true prophet, but Government spokesmen have already hinted that post-war plans must take into account the special trade interests of the Dominions and that sounds like a continuance of tariffs and preferences. In either event, Sir John appears not to realize that subsidies whose aim is to keep up prices to the farmer are just as vicious as quotas and are just as likely to create artificial scarcity. For there is one consideration which nearly all our modern food reformers persistently ignore and that is the effect of their proposals upon the price of land. Subsidies will have the same effect as import duties and quotas; by giving preferential treatment to farmers they will make agricultural land more desirable, more valuable, therefore more dear; higher rents and purchase prices will make land in the market more scarce and thus output is likely to be restricted by more than the subsidies will stimulate it.

This is the heart of the problem which has always baffled the experts who leave out the clues provided by economics and particularly the law of economic rent or land value. Their aims are admirable. Sir John Orr, for example, says in price-fixing the objective will be, not to safeguard the profits of producers or distributors but to ensure an adequate diet within the purchasing power of the poorest family. But how to fix the subsidy: how to control farmers’ costs in the shape of fluctuating rents and land charges. This perennial problem is not apparently recognized as such in any of these discussions. There is no mention of the fact that three-quarters of the farms in this country are held on yearly tenancies and that tenant farmers have no protection against arbitrary rises in land values created by the subsidies that are to replace quotas and duties.

Before the war an International Wheat Commission, to which Sir John Orr draws attention, was trying by means of quotas on production in the exporting countries and by making wheat unfit for human consumption, to prevent a “glut” in the world markets. Our own pre-war food policy had the same objective: to create an artificial scarcity. These schemes were adopted on the tacit assumption that there was already sufficient to meet all needs. At the same time, as Sir John says, there was another Commission, appointed by the League of Nations, which approached the subject from a very different standpoint. Their findings were, that reckoned by the standard of human requirements the pre-war food supply of the world was hopelessly inadequate.

Along with this latter Commission’s findings should be considered the statements of Sir George Stapledon, who has conducted a survey of the grasslands of England and Wales for the Ministry of Agriculture. He says that two million acres of grassland have been broken up by the plough during this war, and that “in England and Wales there remain at least another seven million acres of poorish-to-very-poor permanent grass that as acres can never be made fully productive unless brought under the plough.” The experts confirm, rather late in the day, what we knew all along to be the case.

Sir George’s cure, unlike that of Sir John Orr, is not subsidy or price-fixing. He says: “All the price-fixing in the world can never, of itself, constitute an enduring agricultural policy . . . no matter how generous or how well thought out the prices, prices alone and as such can never ensure that proper care is taken of the land.” What is essential, he thinks, is a regulating department and compulsory purchase of land. The task of the “Lands Commission” which he proposes is somewhat nebulous as stated by him. “Policy must make a judicious balance between commodities which easily dissipate fertility—wheat, milk and potatoes, for example—and those which tend to enhance soil fertility—sheep, pigs, poultry and fattening beasts. Within exceedingly wide limits, the more of the latter we carry,