

CREAM FROM THE EXPERTS

The B.B.C. on September 8th, in a somewhat fulsome reference to the activities of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation, announced that "the cream of the world's experts" had produced a Report which, it was suggested, had practically solved the problem of restoring the economic life of Greece.

The recommendations of the Report were summarised, in effect, as compulsory labour on roads and communications, provision of shelters for homeless peasants, afforestation, irrigation and the building of hydro-electric installations. The peasants were to be "encouraged" to co-operate and it was proposed to grant a loan for these various purposes from the funds of the F.A.O.

The degree of compulsion to be exercised over the peasants was not specified, but it is to be remarked that all the other proposals involve the coercion which is now so universal and so generally overlooked. The experts are not providing the money from their own pockets and at their own risk; the taxpayers of the various countries are to be compelled to supply it at the risk of the Greek people, and the Greek Government is to be compelled to spend it as the experts decide.

No doubt in a crisis there is some justification for measures of dictatorship, and no humane person would complain at any extraordinary measures taken to mitigate the sufferings of the Greek people. It is, however, especially necessary to regard such departures from freedom in due perspective. Before World War No. 1, when a little more common sense prevailed in the world, the normal method was to rely more on the voluntary principle of people investing their money according to their own judgment and at their own risk. If the measures recommended by the experts are in fact sound they will also be profitable. It would be profitable for the individuals of other countries to lend, voluntarily, and for the Greek people to borrow, voluntarily, on such terms as they, too, found profitable. It was on such principles that the despised Victorians developed their countries in a manner attended with infinitely less friction, waste, war and fluctuation than the later era of expert and official dictatorship. This was in fact co-operation of a voluntary kind. If the peasants of Greece are to be encouraged to co-operate, the experts might have recommended the example of the most successful co-operation of peasants in the world, *i.e.*, in Denmark, where the voluntary principle of relieving the producer of some part of the coercive taxation imposed by the State, and leaving him free to co-operate when he finds it profitable to do so, has been given most chance to demonstrate its possibilities.

On the subject of taxation the experts have in fact given some useful advice. Taxes, they recommended, should be taken off small farmers, and, instead, imposed on rents, "properties," and luxuries. Apart from the ambiguous term, "properties," this is such excellent advice that one might well ask the Anglo-American experts the pertinent question: If a tax on rents is so good, why is it not tried in your own countries? One is reminded of those political party machines in Great Britain which recommend Proportional Representation for many other countries but always find insurmountable obstacles to introducing it where their own monopolies might be affected.

There is no more reason to think ill of the industrial expert than of men who sell fried fish or beer; but he has no more claim than they to coerce others. The person who can estimate with some accuracy the profitability of an undertaking involving the savings of perhaps thousands of small, unprivileged investors possesses knowledge of great service to his fellows, and which should be adequately rewarded. Justly to assess this reward, however, two conditions are requisite: there must be a free market for expert advice; and no expert must be in a position artificially to influence the result of operations he has ad-

vised. Every genuine expert will then be able to receive his maximum reward and to make his full contribution not only to directly material progress but to the diffusion of fairly-earned leisure in which men can develop their higher qualities. If, however, the expert is in a position to force his advice upon, and force payment from involuntary investors, and then by all the paraphernalia of economic coercion (or Planning) present a *fait accompli*, there is nothing by which his reward can be assessed, and nothing to distinguish the genuine expert from the flashy imitation. Indeed, as the greater reward under these conditions will go to the expert who can impress officials and parties rather than to the expert who can produce honest results, the advantage will tend towards the flashy imitation. Under the corrupting influence of power the experts will contribute not to the real welfare, but to encouragement of the lower qualities in themselves and others.

It might be argued that if the experts had recommended that the Greeks should be given freedom to borrow from individuals of other countries the Governments of other countries would not have given their people freedom to lend; moreover that Governments now take so much of their people's money in taxation that they would not have had enough private savings, anyhow. And this plea would be admitted by all those who are content to leave things as they are—with every peace conference marking a stage in development towards the next war.

The experts, however, might have taken another course. They might have issued a declaration to Greece and to all the world that the salvation of the Greeks can be achieved by restoring to them their natural rights to produce and exchange in freedom, and that freedom is one and indivisible. Their message to all mankind might have been summarised in Shelley's words:

"Let a vast assembly be,
And with great solemnity
Declare with measured words that ye
Are, as God made ye, free."

Perhaps the experts would reply that—like the war criminals—they were merely carrying out orders, and, moreover, have no concern with poetry or moral principles. And this reply would accord with much official propaganda in which a "standard of living" based on the lowest material desires is held up as an ideal for which other values must be sacrificed.

Some advocates of economic liberty have acquiesced too easily in the alleged incompatibility of moral and material welfare. What pretentious mountains of abstract philosophy have been built on economic ignorance! It is acknowledged that a generous impulse and a universality of sympathy, allied with genius, create the conditions for immortal poetry; it is not so often acknowledged that these same impulses and sympathies, intelligently translated into law, create conditions not only in which poetry can be appreciated, but in which ordinary folk have the independent leisure to cultivate the taste for it.

Shelley, of course, was admitted into the company of "the cream of the world's poets"—long after he had been comfortably dead. But we must not undervalue the influence of those of his inspiration on the longest period of peace which the modern world has known. We may depend upon it; further experience of trusting to the experts will incline the people at length to trust more to themselves.

F. D. P.

Mr. B. Guduleff, Sofia, writes that his colleague, Mr. Edreff, is now translating, for publication in Bulgarian, Henry George's—*Protection or Free Trade*. He sends greetings from Mr. Edreff and his colleagues, Messrs. Kovatcheff and Karaivanoff, and expresses much happiness at now being able to receive LAND & LIBERTY regularly.