

How an Editor tries to sell readers the Big One

THEY TALK about the "power of the press."

Well, it is probably true that a well-established publication which consistently does its job has some measurable impact on its readers.

But as editor and publisher of the Salem, New Hampshire *Observer* (paid circulation 5,120), I am as much aware of limitations as of power.

If I had my way, you see, the people would long ago have amended their constitution to allow a gradual shift in the property tax from improvements to land values. And the people of the three towns served by the weekly *Observer* as its only local source of news – Salem, Pelham and Windham – would by this time have completed that gradual shift and be living happily ever after.

The truth is that those ends have not been accomplished in the 32 years during which I have wielded some measure of "power" as a working newspaperman in my native state, and it isn't because I haven't tried. I don't even have the alibi that the failure is the result of a shortsighted boss. As both editor and publisher for 24 of those years, I have chafed under no saddle except that of the

marketplace.

There may be some value in a brief look at my particular, narrowly-circumscribed role in what can properly be called an ongoing international effort. It comes under the category: case study. Let me offer my circumstances as a thin slice on a laboratory slide.

By Richard Noyes

Instead of going to college, where they keep so many words in storage, I went from high school into theatre, where they use words as a commodity. I was one of the red-headed boys in a play called *Life With Father*. World War II detoured me into three years as a U.S. Navy flyer, but among my clearer memories of the Pacific Theatre is the one of the long days I spent, between trips as a transport pilot to Guam and Samar, inside Honolulu's public library. I wrote a book called *Growth*, which wasn't much good because I hadn't yet found anything worth writing about.

IT WAS apparent to me from childhood, as an awareness of the world around me began to emerge, fed by parents with active though not formally-schooled minds, nourished by a set of *Compton's Pictured Encyclopedia* whose pages my thumb had worn, and stimulated by a public school system I have no wish to fault, that words were wonderful, really wonder full.

I wrote a five-act play in blank verse about Edgar Allen Poe. As a high school student when Neville Chamberlain was being shown here in news reels with his umbrella, I wrote and won a prize for acting in a melodramatic one-acter about what a bad man Hitler was.

The theatre is not an easy ambition to set aside, but it seemed vaguely clear after the war, even to a bewildered young man, that the real magnet was language – words – and that words were used more abundantly in newspapers than anywhere else.

So I went back to New Hampshire in search of a worthy use to which they might be put.

AS A SMALL town reporter for a daily paper, I had a beat

Free trade and the problem of mercantilism....

IN HIS spirited attack on protectionism, Nick Bilitch (Sept.-Oct. issue) concluded that "The case for free trade does not rest on the unique circumstances experienced by Britain during the nineteenth century; its basic truths are timeless".

Unfortunately, this very timelessness may constitute free trade's major disadvantage. Comparative advantage is a static concept with no inbuilt dynamic for structural change. Specialisation makes for inertia, and in the natural order it has often been the route to extinction, whereas man-the-adaptable has thrived.

Today's comparative advantages are the product of particular historic sequences. That one country should have an advantage in manufactures and another in raw materials can mainly be explained by the history of mercantilism. Every economic "take-off" except Hong Kong's has been founded on mercantile policies. Adam Müller, Friedrich List, Gustav Schmoller, Alexander Hamilton, Henry Carey – none were convinced that England should be allowed special dispensation in this matter. Mercantilism, it would seem, is the *laissez-faire* of violent nation-building ages.

Leopold Kohr observed of the developed nations that "as men and women do in

marriage, they united with the fully developed world after they had reached maturity, not in order to reach it". The human analogy can be pressed further. Infant human beings are protected and yet they manage to grow up!

Letter to the Editor

May this not also be true of infant industries? It would seem to have been the norm in the whole of the developed world. British textiles conquered India through political fiat, rather than economic competition. It is in geriatrics that there is no economic future.

Mercantilism, then, is a stage on the road to *laissez-faire* – as can even be observed in Russia and China today. It is the means by which the nation is built up and internal barriers are removed, preparing the field for unregulated free enterprise. And, of course, it is quite immoral. But history cannot be gainsaid: comparative advantage is the fruit of power struggle.

What comfort then can we offer underdeveloped countries which are denied this route to prosperity? Foreign aid is the recognised mode of compensation for the handicaps of history, but it is notoriously partial and unrelated to real handicaps.

"In justice is the highest and truest

expediency." Contributions to the development fund should therefore come from economic surplus which is not earned but which is due entirely to the granting of political privileges, such as ownership of land. Such is the case with land value taxation. But if 30% of Britain's GNP is concerned with foreign trade then one must assume that land values are inflated by some function of 30%. Returning to the community that which is created by the community requires that a proportion of land value tax should go abroad, and where better than into the development fund?

Another component of such a pool of resources could be related to the terms of trade – the rate at which exports from different countries exchange against each other. The income gained from favourable movements in the terms of trade for some countries could be taxed and credited to those countries which have lost out.

Such a system assumes a common renunciation of mercantilism and a common acquiescence in the values underpinning Nick Bilitch's arguments. "Timelessness" is a great advantage. It is necessary to have an awful lot of faith in the power of abstract thought!

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