

PARASITES AND POLITICIANS

By Paul Knight

TALK BY politicians of "social justice" and a "free society" has a hollow ring when one considers how the community is robbed in so many ways by legislation that takes money from their pockets and hands it over to privileged groups.

An instance, typical of many, which has received publicity recently is the licensing of imports of apples. These licences, originally designed (in 1951) in lieu of the more "acceptable" and "recognised" form of tariff protection for home growers, are now being bought and sold among importers for thousands of pounds.

The licences were originally allocated on the basis of a firm's existing and pre-war imports. Since 1951, other would-be importers have been able to obtain licences only by buying them from existing holders—a small section of the importing community.

"One licence holder," reports *The Sunday Times*, October 2, "has found business in licences so good that he is able to live abroad with an income of over £30,000 a year without ever importing or selling a single apple. 'It's not a licence to import apples,' one wholesaler said, 'it's a licence to print money.' This makes it understandable that, at a meeting last week of creditors of J. and J. Lyons (Import and Export) Merchants Ltd., there were roars of protest when an accountant said he did not regard licences as tangible assets."

The Board of Trade considers it "impossible to devise a scheme which will not cause hardship to some people." So no matter how much the community is being robbed, those parasites must not be deprived of their privileges lest it cause them "hardship."

Those who have recently acquired by purchase a state-promoted privilege in the form of an import licence would no doubt cry out for compensation if those licences were made more generally available or were abolished altogether. However, the Board of Trade is looking into the matter so as to arrange some sort of compromise. It is much concerned with the illegal sale of licences and hopes to put a stop to it, though so far its attempts have been unsuccessful.

The Sunday Times takes an odd view of the sale of licences. It says that the expense of acquiring a licence is passed on to the housewife, putting about 8d. a lb. on the retail price of imported apples—and it is likely to be more at Christmas time.

It is, however, not the price of the licence that is putting up the price of imported apples—it is the licence itself; the price of imported apples would be just the same irrespective of who holds the licence. This is why any successful action to stop the sale of licences would be entirely *unsuccessful* in lowering the price of imported apples.

"The Government," says *The Sunday Times*, "considered abolishing licences completely, but has rejected this idea because of the outcry it would bring from the National Farmers' Union."

Blind to the moral issues involved, *The Sunday Times* suggests that a way round the farmers' objections would be to impose a duty on all imported apples. However, this would "place Britain in an embarrassing position because of her obligations under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade."

So, little can be done. We must not upset the *status quo*. Best forget it. The public soon will, as it has forgotten (or never learned of) the potato "fiddle of the riddle," the prohibited free market in eggs, and the bent cucumber farce, when the supply of cucumbers coming on to the market was artificially reduced by stopping the sale of bent cucumbers on the ground that housewives did not want them!

Over-full Employment at the Ministries

By PETER TRACEY

THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, that indefatigable friend of the farmer, is always pouring out helpful advice. The latest to come to my notice is on gorse burning.

Precautions should be taken, it says. Sufficient people should be present throughout the operation to control the burning and prevent damage to adjacent land. Burning should be undertaken only on a calm day, and not after dusk. There should be an adequate firebreak between the area to be burned and adjacent property.

The thing that bothers me about all this is that there are no instructions for lighting the fire. Isn't the assumption that our farmers already know how to handle a box of matches rather a dangerous one?

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Sometimes it is necessary to check a government press release for the official watermark in order to be certain that it is genuine. Otherwise one would be forced to believe that hoaxers had issued a counterfeit press notice in order to make the government look stupid and ridiculous. With the latest notice from the Department of Economic Affairs, however, I am inclined to think that the hoaxers have obtained some of the official duplicating paper.

This notice solemnly informs us that a background paper prepared by the National Economic Development Office for the National Conference on Productivity shows that there is a strong relationship between a country's growth rate and the proportion of its income that is devoted to capital investment.

One day these brilliant men will probably come up with the suggestion that there is a strong relationship between eating and staying alive.