

Human Rights vs. Property Rights

By GLEASON DENSMORE

IN a recent booklet published by the Foundation for Economic Education, entitled "Property Rights and Human Rights," the author, Paul L. Poirot, purports to prove that property rights and human rights are one and the same; no separation or distinction between the two. He contends the two cannot exist independently; that property has no rights, there is only human right to own property.

Among the several definitions of property is this one: "specifically; real estate; the exclusive right to possess." The predominant meaning of "property" is land; has been that since early times because there was little else to own. That else was called "chattels" so as to distinguish between "things" and "land." Thus even in modern concepts a "propertyless" person is one without land. Therefore the true meaning of "Property Right" is the right to exclude from the land.

By this exclusion the person exercising that right can force compliance with his demands since the excluded person must have the use of land to live. This is the basis of the hostility of the two rights: the right of the human to live versus the right to exclude the human from the necessities of life. Consequently when a man is denied the right to take from the bounty of nature what he must have to live, then he must demand a substitute "right" — the right to a job. This demand is the only alternative to starvation.

This demand involves the idea of "politics," a word derived from Greek polis, polit, meaning, city. It was originally used to contrast city and country modes of behavior. City folks must exchange what they have for what they want. Country folks can satisfy their wants by direct application to nature. The city man wanting a dozen eggs must trade something for the eggs.

The country man need only go to the nest and take the eggs.

This demand for a job, Mr. Poirot claims, must be based on the consumer's willingness to buy. But, is that not erroneous? Who doubts the consumer's *willingness* to buy? Most of us doubt the consumer's *ability* to buy! There is a whole world of difference in the two.

The author further contends that since the individual finds it increasingly difficult to prosper by enterprise and thrift he turns to politics and looks to the government for support. So let's be concerned with the first part of the statement: why does the individual find it increasingly difficult to prosper by enterprise and thrift?

Can it be that we are not as hardy as our fathers, or that increased population has decreased opportunity? Does the universal education put us all on a more equal basis so there is less opportunity? Or can it be that monopoly of natural resources has deprived the individual of the opportunity to be enterprising and thrifty?

U. S. Army draft statistics prove men of each draft are bigger than the men of the preceding draft. This means greater strength, therefore men must not be less hardy than their fathers.

Two men can do a job that one man could not possibly do. Ten men can do far more than ten times the amount of one man, so there should be far more benefits for the ten men to share individually. Therefore increased population cannot be the cause of the difficulty.

The more education men have, the more ideas they have. The more ideas they have the more things they can make; so it must not be education that causes the plight.

Now we come to the monopoly of natural resources. Since men today are bigger and stronger than their fathers, they could produce more wealth from natural resources. Since there are more and stronger men than previously, they must be able to produce far more wealth from natural resources than ever was produced before in relation to the number of men producing. Since more men are educated and consequently have more ideas of how to do more with natural resources, the result of all this increase of human power should be a wonderful world of wealth. Instead it is more difficult for the individual to prosper by enterprise and thrift. So it must be that the monopoly of natural resources is the factor that is causing all the difficulty. And the principle that permits the monopoly of natural resources is Property Right. Ergo, Property Right must be changed.

The two "rights" are absolutely opposed and antagonistic. No amount of sophistry can change that fact. The combination of the two as expressed in "Property Rights and Human Rights," can never end the age-old battle, Human Rights *versus* Property Rights. When property rights are made subordinate to human rights, then will end the futile, unnecessary conflict between men.