LAND & LIBERTY

Published by THE UNITED COMMITTEE FOR THE TAXATION OF LAND VALUES, LTD.

Forty-Second Year. - Established June, 1894.

By Post 2s. 6d. per annum.

United States and Canada, 60 cents.

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Postage on this issue is One Half-penny.

OCTOBER, 1935.

THE CAUSES OF WAR

The cloud of the Italo-Abyssinian dispute hangs black across the sky. Mankind can only hope that the combined efforts of the powers at Geneva will avert active conflict between the immediate parties, and so save the application of the sanctions which appear in that event to be the only remedy. If that hope be realized and if Italy remain a member of the League, a great step forward toward the establishment of the reign of international law and the dethronement of national force in regulating the relations of mankind will have been taken. But the League will remain imperfect so long as great nations stand aloof from it, and so long as armaments continue to be piled up and the energies of mankind are wasted in preparation for bloodshed and destruction.

Nor can we be satisfied by the mere prevention of armed conflict, especially if the determining factor is itself the threat of armed force. A duty is incumbent on all nations, whether members of the League or not, to eliminate the real causes of war, and not to be content with frustrating the worst of the results which those causes can bring about.

No one seriously doubts that economic disorders are the ultimate causes of war, though the precise nature and working of these forces is frequently misunderstood.

In its Memorandum to the first World Economic Conference at Geneva in May, 1927, the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade stated that the economic incentives to war might be roughly classified into two groups :—

(1) The antagonism and friction caused by interference with exchange and especially by tariffs ; and

(2) The struggle for new markets and sources of raw materials, especially the demand for colonial expansion, concessions, and protectorates.

With the lapse of time these evils have been accentuated. In an alleged attempt to combat the depression, tariffs have been raised still higher, and yet more grievous restrictions in the shape of import quotas and currency regulations have been introduced.

Even the British government which has been a leader in this suicidal race of repression is beginning to realize that the time has arrived to call a halt. Dr Burgin, one of its representatives, has made a plea at Geneva for a reduction of tariff barriers by means of "bilateral agreements." Another representative, Earl de la Warr, pleads for an inquiry as to the possibility of increasing consumption rather than limiting production, yet he has himself been a leading advocate of the policy of restricting consumption by means of quotas and import boards.

The time for inquiry with regard to these matters is long past. Since Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations* no man of intelligence has any excuse for failing to understand that freedom of trade is better for the country that practices it than restriction.

The arguments in favour of protectionism are not those of public interest but of self-interest. The forces against freedom of trade are those of the privileges and monopolies which grow up in the shelter of tariffs, and those who are exempted from making their fair contribution to the national revenues at the expense of the general body of consumers upon whom the burden of indirect taxation must inevitably fall.

It is true that these are not the arguments presented to the workers without whose votes or acquiescence such policies could not be carried out. To them is held out the delusive hope, so inevitably and bitterly frustrated, of more employment and higher wages. The brilliant analysis of Henry George in *Protection and Free Trade* and *Progress and Poverty* has shown how employment and the distribution of wealth are fundamentally conditioned by the system of landholding, and that so long as land continues to be monopolized, so long will wages remain low and men search in vain for the opportunity to produce wealth.

As to the second group of economic causes of war, we can hardly do better than quote again from the Memorandum referred to above :—

"The struggle for raw materials and new markets, expressing itself in colonization, annexation of territories, establishment of treaty ports, and wars for colonial possessions has been one of the chief sources of international jealousy and discord. The same force is still at work in the world to-day ; and as the less civilized or less highly developed parts of the earth's surface have now been largely appropriated, the danger is all the greater though less openly acknowledged.

"It is true that the possession of a certain colony by one country rather than by another need not necessarily be to the advantage or disadvantage of either. But at present fiscal and other discriminations are made in favour of the traders, settlers and industrialists of the possessing country. Most important of all, grants of concessions to work raw materials over large areas of the most productive territory are often made to individuals and companies who may be able to establish a virtual monopoly and become enriched, while neither the colony nor the parent country gains any appreciable advantage.

"It is, therefore, the duty of those who desire to remove the economic incentives to war to make certain that the citizens of all nations receive equality of treatment in respect of access to raw materials."

The means of securing that equality of treatment are to ensure that those who hold the land shall work it by requiring them to pay to the exchequer an amount equal to the economic rent of the land which they hold. In that way monopoly will be prevented, labour will be secured access to the means of production, and none will profit out of the needs of others.

At the same time the State will be placed in the possession of ample revenues, which will enable it to dispense with tariffs and other onerous taxation ; and thus the products of the land of every country will be distributed by a just equality of exchange among the citizens of the whole world according to their needs.

Though the League of Nations could, if it so pleased, give a welcome blessing to this policy, the carrying out of it must still remain the duty of each individual nation ; and those who within each national boundary are working to secure the adoption of such measures are making the surest and best contribution not only to the establishment of universal peace but also to the economic well-being and happiness of mankind. F. C. R. D.