

## The Dispossessed are Overpopulated

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According to the present-day exponents of the Malthusian theory the world is over-populated, and population will inevitably increase faster than subsistence unless certain unpleasant checks (external or voluntary) kill off or keep down numbers on an adequate scale to enable the survivors to have sufficient food. The theory purports to account for the great want and scarcity which undoubtedly exists in most countries.

But as pointed out by Malthus's critics over a century ago, the plain fact is, to quote Whately's Introductory Lectures on Political Economy, that "much as population has increased within the last five centuries, it yet bears a far less ratio to subsistence than it did 500 years ago." Civilised man with his large populations produces far more food per head than does the savage with his small and precarious numbers, because civilised man, to a far greater extent than the savage, is both a producer and a co-operator. He satisfies his desires and economises in exertion by co-operating with his fellow-men, and for this reason forms a community and a civilisation through which he achieves a greater productivity than men in a savage or sparsely populated state could ever imagine. The more men, the greater the production *in proportion*. Men and hawks both eat chickens, but the more hawks the fewer chickens, and the more men the more chickens, while the more men increase in numbers the more chickens they will produce in proportion, unless checked by mis-government or some other anti-social force.

I have not been able to produce figures and statistics to show the extent of the increase of the world's food production in comparison of the world's population. But it is a matter of experience and common observation that, other things being equal, an economic (not a political) unit with a larger population, can and does, through trade, invention and competition, produce proportionately more subsistence, and

a far greater amount and variety of things above mere subsistence, than is or can be produced in an economic unit of smaller population.

The condition "other things being equal" embodies the most important question of all, namely that of good or bad government. If governments restrict trade and travel and the free exchange of ideas, then the economic unit is broken up into smaller units, more or less completely separated and each with less productive power. Under complete freedom of trade the peoples concerned become a single unit for production purposes and have a greater productive power. Our aim must therefore be to make the world a single economic unit, without any politically-created barriers to freedom of commerce. Present scarcity exists largely because of such barriers, all erected by mis-government. To illustrate: In England after the Napoleonic Wars there was great scarcity and widespread starvation, causing emigration to countries where it was thought that the smaller populations could enjoy plenty. The emigrants were pointed to by the Malthusians as a surplus population for whom there was insufficient subsistence in England. But the repeal of the Corn Laws immediately increased the amount of food available in England and also the amount of subsistence in all other parts of the world now brought within the economic unit. Even then the Corn Laws were not the most serious of the political interferences with production, but their repeal demonstrated that the scarcity then prevailing in England was not the inevitable result of population pressing against subsistence, but of mis-government. It is therefore false to speak of overpopulation while production and exchange are thus disrupted and suppressed. We conclude that in economic units which are free from political interference with production and trade, an increase of population results in a more than proportionate increase in the supply of food.

### **The True Reason for Scarcity.**

How then are we to account for the poverty, starvation and scarcity in the modern world, if we believe the world is not over-populated?

Governments are only human beings, and as such are fallible. Normal failures and mistakes can be pardoned, but gross breaches of essential duty are as blameworthy with governments as with the persons they govern. It is the essence of a government's duty to uphold the equal rights of all its people and to promote their well-being by preventing any violation of those rights. Deliberate favouritism is the worst form of mis-government, and is generally all the worse because it is practised for the unjust benefiting of sectional

interests at the expense of the people. To that feature of mis-government we will return, but let us look first at other circumstances and factors which bear on this subject of population and subsistence. Nearly all countries are wasting their enormous productive powers in waging and preparing wars, both military and "economic," and their governments even go further and actively engage in *preventing* production. Huge armaments, tariffs, import restrictions and other repression and discouragement of trade—even the deliberate destruction of food—still go on in the name of public policy! As in other countries, absurd instances of foolish paternalism are common in Australia and have been carried so far that our hitherto adequate production of wheat and other food-stuffs for export has been seriously reduced, much to the detriment of Britain and other countries which need food. And in spite of the spate of plans which have sprung up in government circles to boost the production of food in Australia, the position shows all the signs of further decline to greater scarcity. The plans indicate the alarm which our governments feel, but plans to avert the results of mis-government while the mis-government continues will only make matters worse. All these measures combine to prevent and discourage production and enterprise. The responsible politicians hold freedom in contempt and refer to it, with the disdain of ignorance, as *laissez faire*—a phrase which they completely misunderstand. Their schemes tend to scarcity. Taxes, quotas, licenses, boards of control, "schemes," "preferences" (Empire and otherwise), subsidies, all divert labour and capital from industry into non-productive jobs for public servants, supervisors, inspectors, welfare officers, and innumerable types of planners, with the result that production becomes more and more difficult.

The truth is that governmental direction and control breeds scarcity whereas individual freedom and unprivileged private enterprise make for plenty. This modern dependence on the State is an outgrowth, not the *basic* form of mis-government. It has arisen and come into favour by way of an attempted reaction from the earlier forms of mis-government which, from the times of the Middle Ages and before, have caused scarcity and suffering for the workers and have given luxury and plenty to those who earn not their bread. The basic type of mis-government and the most potent cause of poverty and scarcity is that form of mis-government and injustice by which the great majority of the world's people, in the interests of powerful and privileged sections, are *dispossessed*.

*DISPOSSESSED!* What is the meaning of this word of doom? Simply that the peoples are deprived of their natural rights in the earth itself. It is a fact that in country after country, the private ownership of land is concentrated in

few hands; the mass of the people are compelled to pay rent for permission to live on the earth and produce from it. All subsistence comes from the earth and we can live and rest nowhere else, so that while the most terrible of all forms of exploitation—landlordism—exists, the masses are *dispossessed*. China, India, Japan, Persia, Iraq, Egypt, Italy, Spain, are ready examples of the scourge. We cannot look at the Near East or the Far East without seeing the picture. In many countries, the poverty and misery are so devastating as to be past understanding by us more fortunates. Even in Australia we have much poverty and malnutrition, but in vast areas elsewhere the masses are always on the border of starvation.

There is no hope for these hundreds of millions of people while they remain dispossessed. But what are the governments doing? When the people demand freedom and equality of opportunity they are given a *plan*, involving large expenditures, the outcome of which is that while temporary relief is given to the sufferers, the rent of land is raised and the real beneficiaries are those who can pocket that. The Plans and Policies have become monotonously regular. Marshall Plans, Colombo Plans, Point Four Policies, but sketchily explained to a credulous world, are acclaimed as intelligent statesmanship, only to be revealed as inadequate, so that more plans and policies must be piled on top of them. One aspect of all those proposals to give aid to the backward countries, provided by generous governments at the expense of their own taxpayers, making a compulsory levy on them and transferring wealth from one set of people to another, should not be overlooked. The question is to what extent it is really inspired by concern for the welfare of the distressed, to what extent it is actuated by pure altruism, and to what extent simply by fear of the spread of Communism? Is it to save *ourselves* from the onrush and terror of Communism that we are thus induced to spend our treasure? How is it that only now, with all that poverty long-subsisting and the people for centuries crushed under it, that we become alive to the fate of those impoverished peasants? We can well give credit to the generosity of the governments and their tax-payers making their gifts of food, clothing, shelter and all kinds of industrial equipment. They mean well with their charity, but the cynic cannot withhold the thought that it is not only for the sake of the famine stricken, but that there is a certain selfish purpose behind it. Yet this makes all the more surprising the failure to see that, given the exclusive monopoly of land in those territories, the gifts can have but one ultimate result, namely to raise rent and give added power to the oppression of landlordism. It is in fact self-defeating so far as any hope is entertained of

combating and overthrowing the Communism, which itself gains adherents with its promises of distributing the land among the landless. The word of the American statesman, Judge William O. Douglas, of the U.S. Supreme Court, should not be uttered in vain : "Unless loans and grants are tied to democratic leaders who will work in their countries to abolish 'feudalism,' we waste our money and perpetuate the causes that breed Communism."

### **The Remedy.**

As Henry George says in *Social Problems*: "For every social wrong there must be a remedy. But the remedy can be nothing less than the abolition of the wrong. Half-way measures, mere ameliorations and secondary reforms, can at any time accomplish little, and can in the long run avail nothing. Our charities, our penal laws, our restrictions and prohibitions, by which, with so little avail, we endeavour to assuage poverty and check crime, what are they, at the very best, but the device of the clown who, having put the whole burden of his ass into one pannier, sought to enable the poor animal to walk straight by loading up the other pannier with stones?"

Landlordism is the greatest social evil of our time. It flouts the moral law and stands athwart all economic well-being. Nothing short of its abolition and the restoration to the dispossessed masses of their heritage in the earth can establish prosperity and peace, and save the world from Communism.

### **The Welfare State.**

The compromise between freedom and control, justice and injustice, good and bad—the Welfare State—is an attempt to solve a problem without ascertaining its cause. It calls on the people to work harder and to suffer greater privations, while jealously guarding the "rights" of every privileged non-producer (including the planners themselves). The English people were dispossessed long before the Welfare State appeared and they now face one more formidable barrier in their fight for freedom.

But, it may be said, there was never so much legislation and organisation to protect and benefit the dispossessed. True, but the legislation and organisation are noticeably so designed that they avoid basic changes. They are laws administered and policed by non-producers, prohibiting or restricting competition, trying to regulate wages, enriching officials and lawyers and demagogues, and all that simply mocking the masses. At bottom, all such measures assume that there are no fundamental injustices, and that poverty

persists as a natural state of things that can only be alleviated. As this assumption is fundamentally false, those paternal and "protective" laws are logically unsound and practically mischievous, and no sincere friend of the people should abase his intellect or compromise his integrity by supporting them.

### **The First Great Reform.**

How can the dispossessed be re-possessed? Only by liberating them and restoring to them their natural heritage in the earth. In Australia we celebrated our Jubilee in 1951—fifty years of national government, but no heed was paid to the original principles of the Scriptural Jubilee—liberation and restoration of the heritage (Leviticus 25). If we were true to the principles of the Jubilee and acted on *modern* lines there would be restoration of the land to the people, and that by way of collecting the rent of land (as land apart from improvements) for public revenue, and using it instead of the taxes now levied on the work of man's hands. By this radical and just measure the economic structure of society will be fundamentally changed. Present landholders will be left in possession of their lands and allowed to use them as they please provided that they pay to the community the full rent of the land only, their buildings and improvements being tax-free. The people, as receivers of the rent, will thus become the real proprietors of the land. The titles of the landholders may remain, but landholders will, in effect, become lessees of the Crown (that is, from the community); at rents periodically revised, and under equal laws, there being no restrictions on production or exchange. No one will hold more land than he himself can profitably use. With opportunities thrown open on a vast scale and with every impetus given to production, because all burdens will be removed from it, the freedom of production and the freedom of trade will ensure to human endeavour (in the absence of droughts, floods and earthquakes) the total banishment of scarcity.

If men are free, under just and equal laws, to produce, exchange, transport and transact any kind of business they desire and without tax, fine or restriction, there will be a full supply of every kind of subsistence that men desire. Until this is done nothing can benefit the masses now dispossessed. It is true there is over-population in many countries, in the sense that there is lack of sustenance for many of the people, but what is the cause of this? It is simply that the so-called "over-populated" are dispossessed and the fruits of their labours are denied to them. On the other hand, justice and freedom, the essence of good government, will, if fearlessly followed, effect the necessary radical change, restore the human masses now slandered by being termed "surplus

population" to their natural rights and social status, and end the long era of mis-government and scarcity.

According to the Malthusian theory there is no room at nature's feast for the "surplus" millions of the world's population. Nature sternly bids them be gone, dooms them to extinction by starvation, war and vice. According to the freedom philosophy, which this International Conference is celebrating and spreading, nature has amply provided for all her children. Secure to the people what rightly belongs to them—rent to the community, and full wages to producers. By a complete trust in liberty and justice, coupled with the knowledge of the natural economic laws of production and distribution, the seemingly hopeless problem of the world will be solved. There will then be no dispossessed and no over-population.

I am not sufficiently optimistic to believe that the Over-Population Theory, although logically demolished by the facts, will die. It has been logically demolished before by far greater pens than mine, but it survives because it so powerfully serves the interests of privilege by diverting attention from mis-government and privileges as the true cause of scarcity, and by alleging that those in want are the victims of the "niggardliness of nature." The whole logical basis and claims of the theory are false. Equality, co-operation and prosperity are the true natural destiny of man. Oppression and scarcity are not the true lot of the masses.

When wilt thou save the people? O God of Mercy, when?  
The people, Lord, the people, not thrones and crowns, but men!  
Flowers of thy heart, O God, are they, let them not pass like  
weeds away--  
Their heritage a sunless day. God save the people!  
Shall crime bring crime for ever, strength aiding still the  
strong?  
Is it thy will, O Father, that man shall toil for wrong?  
No, say thy mountains, no, thy skies; man's clouded sun shall  
brightly rise,  
And songs be heard instead of sighs, God save the people!  
When wilt thou save the people? O God of Mercy, when?  
The people, Lord, the people, not thrones and crowns, but men!  
God save the people, thine they are, thy children, as thy angels  
fair;  
From vice, oppression and despair, GOD SAVE THE PEOPLE!

(Ebenezer Elliott.)

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