

The Rabble At Our Gates

By W. D. Hoffman

The speed with which the authorities of Missouri and the federal government acted to hush-hush the Sharecroppers' Revolt and scatter the protest army from the public roads does not alter the significance of the demonstration. The fact remains that, with only tents for shelter in the dead of winter, more than 1000 ragged men, women and children, near starvation and many of them ill, started a march on the highways of Missouri because of the growing movement in the cotton country to abandon share-cropping in favor of the employment of day laborers.

Landowners have been evicting their renters to avoid sharing crop benefit payments with them. Thus once more we are afforded a demonstration of the fact that government subsidies to "agriculture" are collected not by those who till the soil but by those who own it. Restricted cotton acreage, under "control," has added to the numbers thrown into the bread line, since restricted acreage spells less production and consequently less employment. And while this is happening the people who pay the bills to subsidize the control and the scarcity (all of us) will be paying more and more for what cotton goods we must have.

Share-cropping families have long been among the most submerged

In fact, the many restrictions on production which we are experimenting with in the hope of solving the enigma of poverty in the midst of plenty, the growing power of governments, the menace of war, the hideous unemployment problem—all are traceable to our systems of land tenure and taxation. It is not my purpose, however, to go into these other phases of the subject, which are mere developments of the central theme—that civilization begins and develops with trade, and will reach its highest point only if mankind achieves the ultimate goal of a free exchange of goods, services and ideas.

groups of our working population, eking out a miserable existence because of the rent collected by landlords whose only farming has been that of farming farmers. Their status before government crop-control was pitiful enough, but now the final coup de grace has been administered under the benefit payment program. Since the benefits attach to acreage and the landlords own the acreage, it was only natural that landlords and not land-workers would collect the benefits, as forecast by Dr. Harry Gunnison Brown in *The Freeman* of recent date.

While this little army in Missouri huddled beside flickering roadside fires, facing rain or snow, shrinking food supplies and the danger of disease, millions of government money are being poured into the laps of the Earth owners, fattening those already enriched by the toll collected from those who do the actual farming. The Raskobs, the Campbells, the land syndicates and the banks will continue to collect the subsidies lavished upon the landlords by a generous people. And low as the return to the share-cropper in the past has been, it will be lower still in future due to the day-labor ruse that will enable them to beat down the return to soil-tillers more and more, while continuing to receive largesse from the taxpayer—a taxpayer, by the way, who will be saddled not only with the subsidy to the land monopolists but with the load of increasing relief because of A A A disemployment through curtailment—a taxpayer who will foot the bills of scarcity prices and a staggering national debt.

The entire crazy-house program is made the more tragic because of the tidal wave of human casualties piling up constantly in the form of increasing unemployment. The little army of 1000 in Missouri is merely a dramatic expression of what is going on elsewhere under the scarcity economy. More millions inevitably must go on relief if less and less wealth is to be produced, under

government duress. Already weighted down with workless hordes, how is society going to feed, clothe and house the expanding multitude denied the right to earn their own way in the world? The great middle class that has been the backbone of our republic has been carrying this burden to the point of exhaustion already; it is even now on the verge of being liquidated. When added to this disturbing situation we see no effort to shift the burden to the beneficiaries of the system, but on the contrary a determination to bestow largesse and subsidies upon the Earth owners and rent-collectors, the spectacle makes one fear for the future of America.

The rabble is with us, growing in numbers, though voiceless now. Even in Rome the rabble remained docile so long as the corn-levy could be dispensed. The day of the breakdown could not be put off forever. There is a frightening parallel between the steady absorption of the land resources of the Roman Empire by the aristocrats of that day and the steady march of Earth monopoly in America today. More far-seeing than others of his time Julius Caesar by his celebrated Land Law attempted to open up the resources of Italy to the idle who teemed in the streets of Rome, particularly those among them who had served in his legions. As Ferrero points out, though the State bought up grain in all parts of the world, there was yet a continual scarcity. In the face of growing poverty Italy became a Bacchante. Aphrodite and Dionysus with their train of Maenads flocked into Rome, leading their wild and stirring processions through the streets by day and night in their festive revels. The banquets were so lavish as to raise the price of foodstuffs in the metropolis. All over Italy there was a rage to build palaces, country houses, and to farm land with slave labor, the product enriching the landlords. There is a parallel also in the slave labor of the Empire and that of the share-croppers and migratory workers of today. At least the slaves of Rome

were not on public relief. Even the efforts of the mighty Caesar failed in restoring the land to the masses, as with the Gracchi before him, and the result is history. Divorcement from the land through the exactions of Earth owners has marched downward through the ages as the rock-bottom cause of the fall of nations.

Nor does Rome today under Mussolini perceive this fundamental fact any more than our own lawmakers see it. Dr. Victor Heiser in "An American Doctor's Odyssey" tells of an interview with Haile Selassie in which the doctor remarked on the backward condition of Ethiopia. Haile Selassie quickly asked how many unemployed there were in the U. S., and received the answer "about twelve million." The Emperor commented blandly of the five thousand-year record of Ethiopia: "We have no unemployment; we have never had any. We have no starving. All my people have homes to live in. They have clothes to wear. They are happy." He might have added that they were not on relief, nor camped in the jungles of California and on the roads of Missouri. Why? The land of their birth had not been denied them. The story will be different when civilization a la Mussolini has done its

work, establishing land monopoly exploitation there even on the same pattern as we have it in the United States.

Palliatives such as government relief, at the expense of coming generations, cannot correct the great wrong that locks out man from Nature (the Earth), from which all his material wants must be satisfied. Denial of access to the storehouse, measured by the monopoly charge for the use of land, rural and urban, spells increasing dispossession and unemployment as civilization and invention boost the privilege toll for the use of the planet. Subsidies paid to those who already own the planet must make the lock-out even more complete.

How miserably relief and W.P.A. are failing to meet the problem is shown by the casualties on every hand, from migrant camps to the hovels and slums of village and city, in growing malnutrition, degradation, physical decadence and spiritual breakdown. Dog food sales are mounting everywhere, for human consumption of the canned meat while we pay landowners not to raise good meat. In the little town of Tujunga, Calif., the Padre of the Hills recently told the story of an

Unknown Soldier of today, as related by John Steven McGroarty. This Unknown Soldier was a W.P.A. worker who always took his paper-sack lunch aside from his fellows when he ate. Curious, some of his fellow workers observed the man until one day they looked into the sack and found only potato peelings. When the foreman took him aside and asked if that was all he ate for lunch each day, the Unknown Soldier replied cheerfully yes, that there was a good deal of sustenance in potato peelings, that his small monthly wage went to care for his wife and five children, to buy milk for the little ones and sustaining food for their growing bodies.

How long, Lord, how long are we going to permit the planet to be locked up and denied the children of men while we, the people, pay a cash subsidy to those who lock it up and encourage the disemployment of millions who are denied opportunity to produce food, shelter and clothing? How long will fair words of "liberalism" in Washington continue to lull the rabble at our gates, while they shiver homeless and in rags over a diet of potato peelings and dog food and watch the millionaires whiz by in their arrogant limousines?