

PLAIN TALK *by Jerome Joachim*

"I believe in private property" is a statement many people repeat without carefully analyzing what they mean by property. Suggest that property rights formerly included ownership in slaves and they are willing to limit their definition of property to include everything but human beings. Ask if they are willing to include the rivers, the lakes and the oceans in their definition and they decide to limit their concept still more.



Suggest that the institution of private property is impossible when the group, through the income tax, can take any amount for the common use desired by the group and many will contend that such appropriation is consistent with their concept of private property. Mention other restrictions made against those who have produced and accumulated property for the benefit of those who have not done this and the same believers in private property will defend the restrictions. In the end it becomes apparent that they do not believe in private property at all but feel that the group can do as it pleases with the property created by individuals. Actually what they mean might be stated this way:

"I believe I should have the right to do as I please with my property and should also have the right to do as I please with that which was created by others—if I can get enough people to agree with me."

To defend and maintain the institution of private property, men must have some concept of what the term does mean. In my opinion, the term should be defined somewhat like this:

"To have private property an individual must have the right to keep or voluntarily exchange all goods and services which result from that individual's efforts."

Such a concept would include the individual's

right to sell his labor or the products thereof as he desired, so long as he did not interfere with the equal right of others to do the same. He should be protected in this right by the group or the government so that none could use physical force to prevent him from exercising this right. If he were asked to contribute to the general welfare it would be

purely on a voluntary basis and in exchange for services or privileges which the community conferred upon him and which he could refuse to take or pay for if he desired.

Any departure from such a concept is a departure from the concept of private property. The degree of such departure is the degree to which we approach the ultimate in *public* property as contrasted to *private* property. To argue that the group can forcibly appropriate any portion of what the individual produces is but to destroy the principles which, once compromised, will never stop short of complete communism.

There is such a thing as *common* property. The lakes, the rivers, the oceans—in fact *all* that nature provided which is not the product of human effort is and must be considered *common* property. To do otherwise is to permit some men to collect tribute from others for the privileges of working and living on this planet. If *some* are given such privileges, all will seek similar privileges and soon we will witness every individual and group trying to collect such tribute from others.

Men must learn to give to the community—as common property—that which is not the result of the individual's effort and to allow each individual to keep that which he produces. Unless we learn to do this we will destroy all the incentive which has resulted in the progress we have made and are capable of making.