

The Age-Old Problem of the Land

IN THE LAST HALF CENTURY incredible progress has been made toward assuring the good fruits of our mighty industry to the greatest number. We have not abolished poverty; we shall never abolish it completely, so long as man is exposed to crippling accident and lingering disease of body and mind. But with the expansion of social security, with the marvellous advance of medical science, with the quickening of the public conscience toward the handicapped, the sharpest fangs of poverty are being drawn.

We cannot be so complacent about peace. The world cries peace, peace, but there is no peace. True, actual fighting is confined to a few areas remote from our American experiences. But the "cold war" goes on remorselessly. The world is divided into two great camps, and only a born optimist can foresee a peaceful rapprochement in the near future.

If it were merely a conflict of ideologies we could take heart. For ideologies grow weary. But there is something deeper over which the ideologies flutter. That is the age old problem of the land.

There was never a time in history when the man who worked the land was content to give up a share of the product to the holder of legal title to the land—often an absentee. Agrarian revolt has become endemic in much of the eastern world. We shall encounter it sooner or later on the American continent, where indeed it won its first successes in the Mexican revolution.

Land to the peasants was the most effective slogan of Lenin and Trotsky, in the Bolshevik revolution. There was no sincerity in Communist agrarianism: once communism is strong it takes the land away from the peasants and organizes agriculture in collectives, where no man can call a square foot of soil his own.

A few wise American statesmen understand the relation between agrarian unrest and Communist advance. At the head of this category of statesmen stands General MacArthur. But most of our statesmen refuse even to recognize the existence of the land problem.

In time we shall grapple with the land problem, and communism will wane. We shall then enjoy peace and plenty.

ALVIN JOHNSON

New School for Social Research, New York