

# 1 OPEN FORUM

Land and Liberty Autumn 1996

## RIGHTS CAMPAIGNER'S TARGETS

A LETTER-writing campaign to clarify correct strategies for the economic development of Africa is being waged by Prof. Roy Martin. To the Director of Oxfam (David Bryer) he wrote:

"I refer to your request in a document enclosed in the *New World*, July/September 1996, to sign the Global Charter for Basic Rights. Whilst sympathising with your aims, I regret I cannot do so because I am certain that it is misguided to the extent that you are, on the one hand, telling people what they should have and, on the other, failing to show how these rights can be obtained. You are only listing what most people seek to do and have. You do not acknowledge or make any attempt to determine the reason, which is historic, for them having persistently failed through their own efforts to achieve what they so desire. Calling for governments to do for people what they cannot do for themselves is a monstrous misconception of how things work in this world. Worse, it encourages people to believe that by the accession of governments to such declarations their problems will be solved: whence, when, inevitably under current fiscal policy, they are not, the governments are blamed, often with concomitant social upheaval which in turn again achieves nothing.

"I would be grateful if you could tell me of any governments in this World which state that they do not intend their citizens to have what you regard as basic to civilised living and why democratically-elected governments by the people have failed to give the people what they want.

"What has been proved over the last century is that the presumed remedies [to poverty], including yours, all well tried and tested, have failed. Have you ever asked yourself why handouts or state welfare do not seem to lead to permanent relief? If so, then is it not time for you to consider, even if it means thinking the unthinkable, what is the root cause of poverty at the centre of progress and the reason why people are kept down to the poverty line and are

● Prof. N. R. Martin is well acquainted with Africa. In 1948 he lived in South Africa at the East Geduld Gold Mines, and subsequently served Nigeria (four years in the Cabinet Office of the Federal Military Government), Kenya (six years in the Ministry of Finance and Planning) and the Sudan as the UNESCO advisor on Science Policy.

unable to provide for what you state are their rights?"

TO MALCOLM Harper, Director of the United Nations Association in London, Prof. Martin wrote:

"I refer to the article entitled 'What Is Development' under 'Special Initiative on Africa' (July/September issue, *New World*). The somewhat disparaging statement that the free market philosophy was Victorian and based on a trickle-down approach is a grave misrepresentation. The movement for the removal of the corn laws and other such taxes of the 'Hungry Forties' preceded the enthronement of Victoria who, herself contested, though always constitutionally, universal franchise and Liberal reform. It has always been a trick of those opposed to free trade to represent it as providing an opportunity for the greedy to gain disproportionately to their effort. Your correspondent even believes that human nature is to blame. Now, if it is, then he is proposing human rights which run contrary to human nature - which is perverse.

"In fact, we have never had a true free market. During the so called 'Free Trade Era', Britain became the most wealthy country of the time. In reality, there was nothing to 'trickle down' - that was not the idea. That the labourer did not gain proportionately from the general increase in the production of wealth was due to the fault in its distribution, not in the gaining of it by free trade. It is the

essence of free trade that unhindered competition limits greed. It is protectionism and government interference in the market place which breeds greed by its preferential treatment for some at the expense of others and the granting of privilege and unearned gains.

"The issue for development is not fancy rights in the hands of governments, which know well how to circumvent them, but true liberty which, by definition, prevents governments from intervening in the right to free association, free trade and freedom from plunder by government authority, be it based, however strongly, on so-called democracy."

IN A LETTER to the organiser of a tariff reform campaign, Prof. Martin wrote:

"My recommendation would be that South Africa unilaterally adopt Free Trade. Other countries would soon be at its door to take advantage of the opportunities it offers. A tariff may benefit, for a short time, a particular industry but it does so at the cost of others, particularly new ones. The population as a whole does not gain because the extra cost to them of the tariff leaves them with so much less money to spend on something else. In the long term, the original beneficiaries also lose. Further, wages are not effected by the application or otherwise of tariffs.

"Within the broader meaning of true Free Trade lies the Land Question. South Africa already has in place the machinery and experience of limited taxation of unimproved site values: it merely requires the level to be increased with the concomitant reduction in income and corporation taxes. This will provide early benefits to its poorer peoples without the social and physical disruption involved in the simple redistribution of land. This latter does not solve the problem involved, because, prima facie, no two pieces of land are the same. You would find that the holdings would soon be brought again under the control of the few, thereby reinstating the problem the redistribution of land was expected to solve."