

A LONELY CRUSADE

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THE UNITED STATES government spends millions of dollars subsidising the tobacco industry while at the same time it carries out an expensive campaign to persuade people to stop smoking. The lonely Senator Frank Moss of Utah rises time after time to try to dent the bastions of self-interest in the Senate by urging the cessation of this curious anomaly, only to be met with bored indifference or plaintive and somewhat hackneyed whines about his attempts to "take the bread out of the mouths of little children." (*Christian Science Monitor*, Aug. 6)

But Mr. Moss's lonely crusade against government patronage with one face and condemnation with the other could be extended to a much wider field. Consider, for example, the US government's immense financial encouragement to farmers to grow, and vast payments to destroy, surplus crops, and even payments not to grow at all. Also its support for United Nations in its efforts to solve international disputes by peaceful means, while it pursues a relentless war in Vietnam.

Nor can we in this country escape entirely the charge of inconsistency. We also pay farmers to grow bumper harvests, then aid and abet them in denying consumers the advantage of lower prices. We encourage the production of more and more road vehicles — and more ambulances and hospitals to deal with more accidents. We continue to base our economy to a great extent upon a tobacco tax of close on £1,000 million a year while at the same time we run an expensive campaign to discourage smoking; and it

would be interesting in this connection to know how much the cost compares with what the government allows for lung cancer research.

Some of these parallels, of course, are not very good ones, but it is as well to bear them, and others, in mind when we consider upon how many palliatives and props our economy exists. In fact, it is a debatable point as to whether it exists because of the props or in spite of them.

We seem to have got into the habit of hedging our bets on so many issues. Can this be because our rulers, having to bend the ear to every vested interest, try so hard to accommodate everybody, and end up being the friends of none? The question is itself an answer, as we know only too well.

The short term answers have become the long ones. The radical reforms are rusting and mouldering away, having been discarded for so long. The basic principles of a just land tenure system, free trade, sound money, and personal liberty are now regarded as interesting and archaic curiosities. They have remained long out of use, and the structure of the economic state has become so immense and formidable, that it is considered that to re-introduce one of them at this stage would be as dangerous as trying to build in a forgotten damp proof course under Centre Point.

Well, until a new, refreshing and bold look is taken at fundamentals we shall continue to suffer, like the tenants of a damp and cold building, the recurring discomforts, frustrations and uncertainties of a top-heavy, unsound and expensive economy.