

COMPETITION—TRUE AND FALSE

From an Address by W. R. Lester to the City Business Club, Glasgow, April 22nd, 1920)

After showing by biological illustration that Competition is no arbitrary invention of man, but an inherent necessity throughout all life, without which progress to a higher type is not possible. Mr. Lester said it might come as a surprise to them were he to say that competition is not now, and never has been, allowed to work freely in any business community. In industrial arrangements we have no experience of competition allowed to take its course. Look where we may and we will find it distorted by legalised monopoly or special privilege, and this parody of the competitive system is almost universally accepted as the genuine article. The competitive system as designed by nature is enjoyment of equal opportunity and reward according to usefulness. It is nature's machinery for making benefits received precisely proportionate to services rendered. Under these conditions the most efficient producer must of necessity emerge, and every man get his due. But this true and beneficent competition is to-day perverted into channels which lead to very different results. Equality of opportunity the counties of nature being denied, reward is not proportional to service rendered. In absence of "a fair field and no favour" the competitive machine in countless ways operates so that many who render no service to industry receive much, while others whose services are great receive small benefit.

In absence of this "fair field and no favour" competition works its way in conditions that are little better than a jungle fight, the aim of each competitor is to put down his business rival where he cannot make a deal with him.

For, working as we now do on a basis of monopoly, with the sources of production owned (and often withheld) by a section of the population, while the rest is landless, free competition is utterly suppressed, work is made scarce by the withholding of land and the fear of going under is always present.

These are the results which accrue when the rendering of service does not imply the return of service, and they obtain wherever monopolistic conditions give rise to privileged classes protected from the levelling action of true competition.

But in the name of common sense, do not let us attribute these evils to the action of "unlicensed competition" when they are in reality due to interferences with competition.

Natural competition being service from others on condition that service of equivalent value is rendered by others, is it not clear that it is identical with co-operation despite the very generally assumed conflict between these things in the minds of some reformers? Regarded in this light it is at once seen that what divides society into groups of clashing interests is not competition—for that unifies—but the powers of privilege possessed by favoured classes which enable their members to command services from others without the rendering of equivalent service.

This is not grasped by those who attribute present-day evils to "unbridled competition." Their reasoning seems to be: "industry is now carried on under the competitive system: grave evils result: therefore let us replace competition by State control." The reasoning may be sound enough, but the major premise is false. For the competitive system is not now permitted to operate freely. We do all we can to prevent its operation by denying equal chance for all. Having divided our society into landowners and landless—those who control nature's bounties and those who exist only on sufferance—how can competition be said to exist?

This is monopoly in its most vicious form, and it is the parent of countless lesser monopolies. We actually invite the withholding of land from use by exempting owners of withheld land from taxation—no matter what its value—and when work is thus made scarce, both employing and employed classes seek to shelter themselves from the resulting unnatural struggle for markets and for employment, by hiding behind tariff walls or forming themselves into Trusts, Rings, Combines and Trade Unions, thus erecting a whole series of further obstructions to the free play of competitive industry.

Grant power to some to exact from their fellows payment for access to the earth, and competition with all its benefits ceases to exist.

But to rail at the failure of competition to secure to each member of the community his due reward, when that failure is due to *interference* with competition, is pure childishness. Still more childish is it to prescribe as a remedy still further interferences with competition as do our Tariff Reformers and State Socialists. The true remedy is to retrace our steps where we have gone astray. Abolish the dam of State interference with men's equal rights and let competition perform its appointed function. Competition restored to its normal condition will then distribute the fruits of industry to the door of everyone who takes part in it in proportion to the services he renders. It will then raise the reward of each to the highest point which the existing skill, knowledge and industry of mankind makes possible.

SOME PRODUCE AND OTHERS ENJOY

Address by Colonel Josiah C. Wedgwood, M.P.

The Wimbledon Labour Party have organised and held a series of weekly meetings in the Elite Picture Palace, Wimbledon, which have been attended by crowded audiences averaging 2,000 each night. Mr. Andrew Maclaren had addressed three of these meetings. On the 25th, Colonel Josiah C. Wedgwood was the speaker, who took as his subject: "Is Labour Fit to Govern?" Col. Wedgwood said that the people had been governed by robbers long enough, and now they were going to have the people who had been robbed governing in the future. The present system was unjust, and it was no use trying to make it a little more comfortable; it only annoyed people. The prime injustice was that the workers produced the wealth of the world and other people enjoyed it. Therefore politics ought to aim at putting an end to that injustice, and not making the injustice a little bit more tolerable. The worker did not get the full reward of his labour at the present time. They must find out what prevents him getting the full reward. There was always in operation the iron law of wages; that was an economic law, not an Act of Parliament. As long as there were two men after one job those men had no alternative except to get that job or starve. As long as that was the condition they would undercut wages, and wages everywhere in spite of trade unions would tend to sink to subsistence level. That law was in operation to-day. All round the labour market there were a mass of half-employed or unemployed men and women all anxious for jobs, all cutting the throats of the men and women who were at work. It was the presence of the unemployed that deprived those who were employed not only of their full reward of their labour, but also of the freedom to bargain.

Col. Wedgwood described how at Ermelo when he was Resident Magistrate, men were allowed to go and work on the surrounding crown lands. They were

thus able to bargain with employers and so wages were kept up to the highest possible level. Each man got the full reward of his labour by digging coal for himself; he was not robbed by capitalist, landlord or the State. The same principle that he applied in that little corner of the earth would apply here. The secret of the whole thing was to deal with the unemployed. The secret was to see that there were no unemployed to be used as whip for the rest of the workers. Every time they saw a vacant building site, or a big farm wanted for allotments or smallholdings, there they saw unemployment being created. Free access to the raw materials would provide the solution of the unemployment problem. The globe had been given to all men with the raw materials ready to hand. Men had the power to work these raw materials into things to be used. If there was want, if there were thousands of people tramping the streets in search of work it was because the earth intended for all had been made the private property of the few. (Applause.) There on one side of the wall was the man able and willing to work, and on the other side of the wall was the raw material on which alone he could work, and it was the business of the Labour Party to knock that wall down. If the primary trades, such as the building trade, agriculture, mining, quarrying, clay-getting, could get free access to the raw materials these industries would call upon the services of all classes of the community to complete the processes of manufacture.

In reply to a question as to whether he was in favour of declaring the land common property on a certain date, Col. Wedgwood thought that any sudden change might produce disaster, but the mere imposition of taxation upon land values coupled with all the local authorities levying their rates upon land values instead of as at present would immediately appropriate three-quarters of the land value of the country for public purposes. It would knock the bottom out of land monopoly, and that would mean that land would be thrown upon the market and become cheaper.

BURN YOUR SCHOOL-BOOKS

(From an Article by Jerome K. Jerome in "Common Sense" of 13th May)

Anatole France, addressing a Congress of French teachers a little while ago, commenced his speech with the following words: "The war," said this old fighter for new ideas, "has sufficiently demonstrated that the popular education of to-morrow must be entirely different from that of yesterday. Out of the social and moral disorder created by the war and perpetuated by the peace which has followed it you will have to rebuild from the foundation. Man is capable of change, and it is education which transforms him more than even air and food. Burn all the books which teach hatred. Exalt work and comradeship. Let us develop reasonable men, capable of trampling under foot the vain splendour of barbaric glories, and of resisting the sanguinary ambitions of nationalisms and imperialisms which have crushed their fathers." It is education that is responsible for war. The history that is taught to the children of every country is written with the express purpose of sowing the seeds of hatred and preparing the ground for future wars. I have read the standard history that is given to the children in America. It teaches them to hate England. The histories that were given to me at school taught me to hate France like the devil, to regard the millions of India as a lower breed whose one achievement worth recalling throughout their forty centuries of civilisation was the Black Hole of Calcutta. I was taught that England had been specially selected

by God to represent Him upon earth, and that all other nations were outside the pale. For twenty years before the war every Englishman was educated to the hatred of Germany, and from German school-books I have gathered that German children were taught to hate and to despise England. In every country the people are brought up to divide the world into two classes: themselves and "the dirty foreigner." Lloyd George promises M. Clemenceau that he will bring up English children for the next three generations to be the devoted admirers of France. If Lloyd George means business he will have to begin by scrapping our school histories and issuing a new one of his own. I am at present enjoying the reading of a famous French history. It is typical, I take it, of the history taught to French children. The chapter I have just finished is a finely-written denunciation of everything English. It holds up English cant and hypocrisy, English savagery and double-dealing to the contempt of every French schoolboy. To the generation that is flinging aside its school satchels and pouring out into the world the mischief has already been done. The joys of battle have been instilled into our youngsters. The man on the prancing horse slaying and laying waste the land has been duly held up to him as the model hero. Our Empire Days have come and gone, the Union Jack has been duly waved, and the fact impressed upon his mind that the Englishman's God-appointed duty is to relieve every other country not strong enough to defend itself of the burden of its own possessions, that the sun has no right to set upon any part of the earth that does not belong to Great Britain. Every boy you speak of dreams of one day driving a tank or dropping bombs from an aeroplane. Whether upon Germans, Russians, Frenchmen or Americans, he is—to do him justice—impartially indifferent. While every high-spirited girl dreams of being shot at sight as a Red Cross nurse and having a hideous memorial erected to her memory in Trafalgar Square. Can one persuade these young people that their education may not after all be as complete as they thought it? The Adult School Union, writing from 30, Bloomsbury Street, London, sends me leaflets telling of their enterprise. I take no responsibility, but to any young man or woman whose thirst for knowledge has not been satisfied by the historical and scientific information provided at the average preliminary school I would recommend inquiry. The Adult School Union will not help him to become a more efficient business man. I doubt its doubling anybody's salary or securing a single husband. But may be—at least one hopes—that amongst the youngsters stepping forth into the world there may be some wishful to help, willing to serve. And to such knowledge is needful.

We regret to record the death of Mr. Thomas Ronald, of the Portsmouth League, at the age of 53. Mr. Ronald, one of Mr. McGuigan's "converts," was one of the founders of the local League, which has done splendid work for the cause among the Dockyard workers and in the town of Portsmouth.

I welcome the retention of the State Valuation Department. Its abolition would not be intelligent economy. As sure as this is Thursday a reform of taxation and rating is coming. Change is in the air, and public opinion is ripening fast for it.

When it comes the Department will be there to tell us whether or not we should tax land or buildings and how we should tax. Against that time the Single Taxer can be up and busy, producing facts to show that land or site burden is the great handicap on the nation.—"Hal o' the Wynd," in the "Glasgow Evening Times," 22nd April.