

Correspondence

THE MOLDY BONES OF MALTHUS DO A GHOST DANCE IN INDIA

EDITOR LAND AND FREEDOM:

There appeared in a recent number of *Asia*, an American monthly devoted to affairs in the far and near East, an article that attempts to state the case for birth control in India, a land where man is most prolific. The writer is F. M. de Mello, formerly an editor of an Indian paper and now a special lecturer in Economics in an Indian university.

The thing that bothers Mr. de Mello, as well as a large number of Indians of the higher castes, is that the lower castes multiply so fast that the parents can not provide properly for so many mouths under the opportunities open to them and in consequence infant mortality is high and the children that survive are puny and undernourished to a degree that would mean death to children of northern races. This, in itself, would lead to racial extinction in a few decades among other races, but these Indian natives of the lower castes seem to have a tenacious vitality, and they have been living under conditions of semi-starvation for centuries. But in this they are not alone in this world. It is said that the descendants of the race conquered by Pizarro have not had a sufficient quantity of food for a man's daily needs in four hundred years, yet they can perform the most arduous labor and carry unheard of burdens supported by a tump line about the forehead. They have refused to be starved out of existence and kill the pangs of hunger by chewing the leaf of a shrub of narcotic properties. Moreover, these Andes redmen live in a climate that is raw and damp, and they have the extra problem of keeping warm where fuel is scarce and freezing temperatures follow the setting of the sun. It would seem as if the Great Creator had no intention of permitting certain races of his children to be exterminated by the evil deeds of other men. The problem of malnutrition is the same in India as it is in the highlands of South America, and in our island of Puerto Rico, and, in fact, in any other land where certain members of the community can not find the chance to produce the necessities of life. In other words it is a world problem.

The writer took Mr. de Mello to task for the assertion that birth control is the only way out for India. He also made the claim that birth control can never be any but a personal matter for the persons involved to solve for themselves, that it can never be considered as a way out for a people suffering want and privation because of the rapacity of man. He suggested that unless the cause of the poverty and distress were wiped out at the root neither birth control nor any other remedy for symptoms could better conditions. Henry George was quoted as to conditions in India fifty years ago and attention was drawn to the fact that they are about the same today. The writer also called attention to two facts, or laws; that large families are the result of unfavorable economic conditions and not the cause, and that as conditions improve and security is assured families tend to become smaller; and, that larger populations, other things being equal, are better provided for than smaller populations. The last might be expressed in another form to account for the failure of large proportions of the population to enjoy any of the increased comforts that come with advancing civilization; the greater the population the greater the production of wealth in proportion and in the aggregate.

All of these things Mr. de Mello denies. He says outright in his answer to my criticism, that as populations increase, it becomes increasingly difficult to provide for them. This is the Malthusian Theory and it is also the so-called law of diminishing returns. He thinks he has refuted the writer in this by asking whether it is not possible under the Georgean theory to conceive of the population and wealth being increased two fold, three fold, four fold, ad infinitum, and whether, under the circumstances, our country is not shortsighted

in restricting immigration. The answer to the latter question is "Yes" of course, but the former is a ridiculous question since it is not based upon reason. The real answer is that the ability of the land to support life depends upon the content of those elements needed by the protoplasm in the cells of living things, and that these have never been exhausted since they are returned to the earth with the death of the organism. No more life can exist than can be replenished by Mother Earth, and since life, both plant and animal exist in India, the land is able to support its people. Should the soils in any spot be leached out so that the elements and compounds are carried off to the sea the fruitfulness of other sections might be called upon to support life in places seemingly barren of fertility through the processes of exchange. But Mr. de Mello thinks that the only way for India is to reduce its population, production remaining static. He says flatly that India has reached the limit of its soil's capacity to support agricultural population. He mentions the density of population as nearly as great as that of Belgium and admits that industry in manufacturing might help, but here he shakes old Malthus once more. He says that of course the writer knows that the industrialization of any country brings in machinery which will displace labor and make the situation worse. Of course the writer knows nothing of the sort.

Mr. de Mello admits that the landlords take of the product of labor without adequate return, but he says that they do not bleed the country white and that the mediant priesthood is negligible. He does accuse the British government of maintaining a large army in India at the expense of India and of collecting charges of 35,000,000 pounds Sterling which are sent to Great Britain and for which the Indians get no return. He does not see that a country which is able to support landlords, Maharajahs and their courts, together with the British Indian army, and still have \$185,000,000 to send away, and for which wealth no return is made that in any way benefits the lower castes, is a long way from the optimum of population in which he professes to believe. He insists that there are more people in India than India can support from her soil. Thus does Old Moldy Malthus do his ghost dance in the institutions of learning under British influence in India.

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A REMONSTRANCE FROM NEW ZEALAND

EDITOR LAND AND FREEDOM:

In common with other disciples of Henry George, I am much interested in the campaign now in progress in California, which is to culminate in a referendum in November next. It comes as a painful surprise, however, to find that the efforts of our esteemed co-worker, Mr. Jackson H. Ralston, are ridiculed and belittled in certain quarters as being of no importance. Curiously enough, the critics call themselves Henry George men. Yet not a scintilla of evidence can they give, to show that Henry George ever gave their methods or views the slightest support, indeed the chimera of doing everything at once was never mentioned, nor was it in contemplation in his lifetime. On the other hand, there is the fullest proof that the methods his disciples have followed in different parts of the world had his entire approbation.

For example, I have in my possession a letter from Henry George commenting upon the imposition of a land tax in New Zealand by the Ballance Government in 1891, in which he states that "anything done in the right direction anywhere helps the movement everywhere." He then goes on to say that the separate valuation of land and improvements and the imposition of a tax on the unimproved value of land is a good beginning "but, of course, only a beginning." Further, the first Liberal Government in this country, the Grey Government, imposed a land tax as far back as 1878 of one halfpenny in the £1. Small as the proposed impost was, it stirred "the landed interest" to its depths, and after the defeat of the Grey Government a year later, one of the first actions of the new government was to repeal