

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.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

JOHN LUXTON.

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

the land tax. This attempt of Sir George Grey to place the taxation of the country on a right foundation attracted world-wide attention. It was made before "Progress and Poverty" was published. It did not escape the attention of Henry George and subsequently he made frequent public commendatory references to it. Indeed I remember well that when he was met by Sir George Grey at Auckland on his way to Australia in 1890, the author of "Progress and Poverty" made special reference to the work of Sir George Grey, pointing out that his work was "the root and beginning of Single Tax in New Zealand." A year later there was imposed in this country a land tax of 1d. in the £1 and despite the machinations of the enemy, it remains to this day. Further, as your readers are doubtless aware we won local option in taxation in 1896 and today 80 out of our 100 municipalities and 60 out of our 122 counties, levy their taxation on the unimproved value of land. In its original form the Act was made inapplicable to certain special rates, but in 1911 those exemptions were deleted, and since that date if and when a poll is won under the original act, all the local taxation in the district falls upon the unimproved value.

In this city of Wellington, for example, the annual rate revenue of £530,000—2,120,000 dollars—is derived entirely from the unimproved value, that is to say all the buildings and other improvements are entirely exempt from local taxation. The importance of the principle was fully illustrated by the fierce and unscrupulous opposition which the proposal encountered.

I write feelingly in this connection since I was mainly responsible for the poll in 1927. To secure a poll fifteen per cent of the rate-payers must sign a demand, and to obtain those signatures meant a year's hard work for a mere handful of enthusiasts. Nevertheless the proposal was carried by 8,000 to 4,000 votes, and it is beyond all question that the verdict will never be reversed. A Labor Government has just been returned to power in this country, and at the present moment we are organizing a deputation to lay proposals before the prime minister providing for:

1. The compilation of proper statistics showing the number of urban landholders, the number of rural landholders, etc. This for purposes of propaganda.
2. The repeal of the present land tax, and its replacement by a flat tax without exemption or graduation.
3. The making of rating on the unimproved value of land mandatory instead of optional as at present, and
4. The abolition of the law which permits local bodies to utilize the profits of trading concerns in reduction of rates.

Surely all this is practical propaganda making subsequent progress easier?

It is a matter of history that a land tax was imposed in England as far back as 1693. No provision was made, however, for the periodical re-valuation of land, and despite the provision made by the Government of William Pitt in 1798, enabling landowners to commute the taxation, it still exists but is collected on the valuation of 1693. The great Adam Smith points out in the work usually styled "The Wealth of Nations," published in 1775, that the grave defect of the English land tax is "the constancy of the valuation," and he goes on to argue that a statute providing for the periodical valuation of land, "indemnifying the landowner for his expenditure"—that is to say, exempting improvements—"should be a perpetual regulation or fundamental law of the commonwealth." In recent times two attempts have been made to pass such a fundamental law, and on each occasion they have been frustrated by the landed interest. Nevertheless such a law is an important and necessary preliminary step to the Single Tax, and it will undoubtedly be enacted ere many years in England.

Our modern critics, however, are impatient of such paltering. In language the reverse of courteous they criticise the men who devote themselves to the work of achieving such advances, and, in defiance of all history, they invite us to believe that everything can be done in one budget! Henry George men everywhere have been heartened

by the progress made from time to time in this country, in Australia, and in Denmark, but we are told that such progress means nothing! That is to say Henry George, when he wrote that "anything done in the right direction anywhere helps the movement everywhere," was writing nonsense!

Finally, what warrant has anyone for applying to us the contemptuous epithet, "step-by-steppers?" The initial steps in any reform are necessarily the most difficult. The great objective is that a beginning should be made on right lines. Accordingly, a valuation system, on the principles laid down by Adam Smith, is in itself something worth fighting for. Once having realized that, it is very important that the tax itself should be levied in accordance with right principles, certainly without exemptions or graduations. The question of mortgaged land may raise practical difficulties for example, and I remember that Henry George himself stated more than once that mortgagor and mortgagee were really partners, and that the tax should be apportioned between them in accordance with their respective interests. We have always maintained, however, that a stage must be reached in the movement when progress will be accelerated.

Once a proper beginning has been made the remaining work must necessarily become easier, and when we have advanced sufficiently to make apparent to everybody the benefits of land value taxation, then the volume of opinion in support will become irresistible, and it may well be that progress on the lines visualized by our critics will become not merely possible, but inevitable. Anyhow, I am certain that the vast majority of Henry George men throughout the world wish well to the movement now going on in California, and I hope and anticipate that the financial help sought by our co-workers there will not be lacking. Moreover, as some evidence of my own feelings and as a protest against the unwarranted attacks made on our friends, it is my intention to transmit ere long some practical evidence of the sympathies of Henry George men in this country.

Wellington, N. Z.

P. J. O'REGAN.

"WRIT SARKASTIC"

EDITOR LAND AND FREEDOM:

That eminent economist, Dr. Townsend, proposes that Uncle Sam pay the sum of \$200 every month to each of his nieces and nephews from the age of sixty years upwards. This sum must be spent within thirty days after its receipt, and the beneficiaries must agree not to work. (We agree).

I offer a better plan called "The Retire At Birth Plan."

As soon as a child is born, let Uncle Sam hand the proud parent his promissory note for \$20,000 with three per cent interest, payable twenty years later. These notes can be printed in lots of one million and with the big seal of the United States, duly affixed, will look very pretty when framed. In fact, their value would increase if the President and the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court could be induced to attach their pictures and autographs.

The three per cent, or \$50 monthly, would be paid to the child's parents until the child had attained the age of twenty. The United States would set aside \$1,000 annually so that when the "little Liberal or little Conservative" had attained the age of twenty years, his Uncle Samuel would hand him the nest egg of \$20,000.

This isn't the whole story, by a jugful. At the age of twenty, the young man with his \$20,000 could marry a young woman, similarly endowed, and they would start housekeeping with \$40,000.

How many readers of LAND AND FREEDOM started their careers with so magnificent a fund?

The \$40,000 couple need never to work if they signed a contract with the Government to bear at least four children. Because for each child the parents would be paid \$50. monthly until that child had reached the age of twenty years, and there would be enough of their own \$40,000 left to care for them in their old age.

Here are some of the advantages of this plan, which, by the way, is not original with me.