

are of abiding benefit to the depressed classes for whom they are intended. What are the governments of the under developed territories doing to help themselves? Very little, by all accounts. Tinkering with the root-evil of rack rent landlordism by compulsory purchase and piecemeal redistribution of land only helps the few at the expense of the many. Mutually ruinous tariff battles, preventing the free flow of vital goods between country and country, add to the general impoverishment. The collection for public revenue of the increased land rents arising out of capital development in these territories is the sole effective guarantee of the success of "War On Want". If it is certain that this will be done then the campaign deserves the widest popular support. Otherwise, the plan has no secure foundation and investment in it would be an act of wildly optimistic speculation.

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Kenya Today

"The problem of overcrowding among the Kikuyus has set brother against brother in litigation over small plots of land....Overcrowding in Kikuyu land has begun to undermine the traditional peasant society. The tribesmen have been forced into towns, and 250,000 have been drawn into the white highlands as workers on 3,000 white farms. The settlers admit they could not carry on without Kikuyu labour, and this dependence is an important factor in the conflict".

- "Observer" 2nd. November 1952

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THE PORCUPINE

(WITH SOME TELLING POINTS)

November & December 1952.

WAR ON WANT ? In the world as we know it poverty is the lot of nearly every human being - but in some countries this poverty is far deeper, more abject and hopeless than in others. In New Guinea, eight out of every ten children die before the age of puberty because of malnutrition. In 1950 a survey of one Persian village showed that 82 out of 144 children died for the same reason. There is an unending stream of such appalling facts to be unearthed by those who have the courage to seek them out.

It is the aim of a recently created organisation "The War on Want" to bring about a huge development of these backward areas of the world as a means of putting an end to this poverty. The leaders of "War On Want" are of the opinion that this development is only possible if the industrialised nations are willing to pour into these areas a colossal stream of capital equipment and technical advice. They estimate the minimum annual cost, at present price levels, to be roughly 10,000 million dollars.

The sponsors of this campaign must be given credit for good intentions; they see misery, degradation and squalor around them and are moved to do something about it. But 10,000 million dollars is a lot of money in any language, and since we are being urged to foot some part of the bill we are entitled to ask if expenditure on such a scale will, in fact, produce the desired result. Industrialisation, mechanisation and improved techniques can be had for the paying for, we know, but does universal prosperity automatically follow in their wake? Will the peasant's lot be eased because Western science can show him how to raise crops from ground where nothing grew, or to multiply the yield of fertile land a hundredfold? Will the village craftsman, scratching out a meagre existence by old, traditional methods be materially bettered for having imbibed the doctrines of Mr. Henry Ford? Will these men and their

families be enabled to live as abundantly in the pursuit of happiness as they now endure the extremities of hopelessness and despair? In short, will common living standards be raised? The staff officers of "War On Want" say, Yes. If they are right we are being offered a bargain basement millennium and should snap it up while we have the chance. But experience, which is really the only thing we have to work on, says, No. Let us go into the matter a little further.

Very little investigation is needed to make depressingly clear the fact that nowhere has the spending of large sums of money of itself succeeded permanently in improving the common lot. The reason why, is not hard to understand; ability and willingness to work in themselves produce nothing. Men's strength and mental faculties must be exerted upon land before food can be grown and the necessities of life be created. All men live by and on the land, directly or indirectly. Life without land is an impossible contradiction. Moreover, man has the natural right to consume, exchange or dispose of as he pleases all that he himself produces. All this is elementary and would hardly be worth mentioning were it not that many quite intelligent people seem unable to grasp its full significance.

The extent to which man is able to enjoy the amenities of material civilisation depends directly on how far he may exercise his right to consume the product of his own toil. Where land is privately owned this right becomes a dead letter. In such circumstances the landowner is empowered to impose whatever terms he may choose for permitting work to be done at all. The tenant is powerless to resist his landlord's demands; his only alternative is eviction and starvation. It is easy to see why relief schemes of the "War On Want" pattern cannot effectively aid those who are most in need unless the basis of society is drastically altered. Without this being done all benefits must ultimately be taken to swell the already fabulous wealth of the landowning class.

The mechanics of the thing are simple enough; an Indian peasant, producing wheat to the value of (say) 80 rupees and paying a rent of 50 rupees, is given technical assistance and works hard to increase his output to a value of Rs.180. A clear case of reward for enterprise and initiative? Not at all. Along comes the landlord's agent and tells the tenant that owing to the high cost of living his employer finds it necessary to raise his rent by Rs.100. The tenant finds this incredible and doubtless remonstrates with some heat, but all protest is useless, he must pay. He has no choice. His family must be fed and housed, however badly, and so he finds himself working twice as hard for the same slender return.

In view of this it is hardly surprising that efficient husbandry is not a prominent feature of rural India.

Again, a factory increases its output by a value of Rs.5,000. More pay for the workers? No; simply so much more for the landlord. The factory hand has no means of enforcing a claim for higher wages. He is another victim of a system in which restrictions on the use of land create, artificially, a vast pool of surplus labourers who must compete among themselves for a limited number of jobs and tenancies, driving rents up and wages down. Unemployed man is a symptom of unemployed land. That the Rs.5,000 in the above illustration appears in the company's books as 'profit' and not 'rent' merely obscures its real nature, since, in effect, it corresponds to the Rs.100 extracted from the peasant in the previous example.

All this is not just airy theory, it is hard fact, proved by experience in every country where industrial development has taken place. In the past hundred years enormous capital projects have been carried out in India - railways, irrigation, buildings and so on - yet today, poverty is as widespread as ever and the rich are richer than before.

But the land monopoly is not a peculiarly oriental vice. On the contrary, its damaging effects can be observed in any western country. Between wars, in America, the government sponsored Tennessee Valley Authority constructed great water-control and irrigation plants. Nearby farmland values rocketed. Owners became wealthy men. Tenants were hardly benefited; their rents rose sometimes to as much as twenty and thirty times the previous level. The public, who might at least have expected some slight reduction in the price of their food, got nothing, apart from a few picture postcards - and the bill. Nearer home, in Buckinghamshire land with a rating assessment of £1,222 was bought by the government at a cost of £109,000, as part of a 'green belt' plan. Evidently, if £1,222 was the true value of the land, then the government was grossly overcharged for its purchase. If, on the other hand, its sale price was the correct figure then the owners had for years past been excused their full contribution to the county's revenue for no sanely accountable reason. Either way, the community suffered a tremendous loss. Another area, scheduled for development as an atomic research centre, was bought by a speculator for £44,000 and re-sold for £120,000. Examples like these could be multiplied indefinitely, displaying a form of extortion which is not only permitted, but facilitated, by our absurdly archaic attitude to land.

The real problem confronting the "War On Want" company is not one of raising money, but of ensuring that the funds applied