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The Plain People

verses

The Rich and Honorable

by

J. B. Chamberlain

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The Plain People
versus
The Rich and Honorable

It is sometimes necessary in economic discussion to generalize but there are so many exceptions to any generalization that it often seems unfair and it gives the contra-minded an opportunity to quibble.

There is, unfortunately, no definite line on one side of which we can group the good as distinguished from the bad because goodness blends into badness as the light of a summer day, through a long twilight, into the dark of night. Nor must we forget that there is so much that is bad in the best of us and so much that is good in the worst of us that it behooves all of us to be charitable.

Two philosophers, with almost three thousand years between them, helped in the selection of a caption: The plain people versus the rich and honorable. One of the economic gems of Confucius reads: "When a country is well governed, poverty and a mean condition are something to be ashamed of. When a country is ill-governed, riches and honors are something to be ashamed of".

To forestall a first jump to a wrong conclusion perhaps I should say that we believe in wealth for those that merit wealth, honor for those who achieve it and poverty for those who deserve it; that every man should have in proportion to his education, his skill, his industry and his frugality; that those who contribute much should acquire much, those who contribute little, absorb but little, with spontaneous, bountiful

and acceptable charity for any unable to contribute. We agree with Confucious that when a country is well governed poverty and a mean condition are something to be ashamed of because ^{they} would then reflect the shiftlessness of those afflicted, but when a country is ill-governed riches and honors are something to be ashamed of because the rich and honorable dominate the administration that thrusts poverty on efficient and industrious men by permitting monopolistic control of the opportunities in which every man has a right to participate.

The other philosopher, in extreme solicitude for the permanence of our institutions, said; "the thought of the plain people, who enjoy no privilege and have very simple and unsophisticated standards of right and wrong, must prevail, if the government is to survive". His thought, no doubt, coincided with ours that there is goodness enough, innate in the American people, to insure their right-doing if their doings were prompted and directed by a knowledge and comprehension of economic truth, of which they get but a glimpse, now and then.

From time immemorial the truth has been kept in obscurity and the plain people kept ignorant, deluded and subservient, as hundreds of references in any book of quotations will disclose. The wise man of our catechism admonished us to "buy the truth and sell it not, also wisdom and understanding" Emerson referred to the truth as "the summit of achievement" John Quincy Adams wrote twenty-five verses about his wants and among them we find;

I want a keen, observing eye,
An ever listening ear,
The truth, through all disguise to spy
And wisdom's voice to hear.

The quotation, "Truth hath a good face but bad clothes" may have prompted Emerson to write; "The best looking people are with the majority, but the best principles always with the minority" Because, as another philosopher said; "There is nothing so odious as the majority. It consists of powerful men who lead the way, accommodating rascals, subservient weaklings and a mass of men that trot along without knowing in the least what it is all about" It must be the thoughtlessness and inertia of the plain people that keeps their principles so completely in the background.

Here are two old ones, one written in 1635. "Truth may be blamed but it ~~need~~ never be ashamed" Those who recall the propaganda that led us into the World War will agree with us, I am sure, that propaganda has much to be ashamed of.

The 1635 quotation is; "Many have too rashly charged the ~~troops~~ of error and remain as trophies with the enemies of truth." One of America's sincere, benevolent old men,

Eugene Debs, was imprisoned at Atlanta because he then knew, as most of now know, that war showers riches and honors together with poverty, anguish and misery for the plain people.

Two weeks ago, we said that our endeavor was to stimulate enthusiasm in a search for the truth, and courage to follow it wherever it might lead. Now, we are commenting on an address by Nicholas Murray Butler, that was printed and widely

distributed in which he inquired for some way in which -and quoting, "a sluggish, a self-centered and somnolent public opinion can be stirred to look deeply into these questions before it is too late. Too late for what? Too late to stem the tide of discontent, of disorder and of economic and political revolution. Great masses of men will not indefinitely sit quietly by and see themselves and those dependent upon them reduced to penury and want, while what we call civilization has so much to offer, commands such stupendous resources and seems capable of accomplishing almost anything. Somewhere and somehow there is a gap, a want of balance, in our social, our economic and our political system, which we have not found the ways and means to fill or supply." That, for the moment, ends the quotation, with all of which we agree except the last sentence. "Somehow and somewhere there is a gap, a want of balance, in our social, our economic and our political system which we have not found the ways and means to fill or supply."

We tolerate existing conditions because propaganda has made that the general assumption, together with the idea that the utmost is being done by the Rich and Honorable to disclose those ways and means, so that we, the plain people should sit on the style and continue to smile, in patience, awaiting the millennium. That assumption is wrong. The conditions of which we complain are not of omission but of commission and they are not to be remedied by anything "we" the Rich and Honorable, can do for "them", the Plain People, as by robbing Peter to help Paul. They are the consequences of what

* both of which will be accomplished by collecting the rental value of land in lieu of taxes

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has been done and to remedy them we need not fill a gap nor supply a balance. We have bpt to permit the jobless to employ themselves and to stop the theft that inflicts poverty on those that have employment.* That is the quick answer, from which he diverts attention, not displaying it, or denying its truth, because truth assailed becomes dogmatic.

Continuing the quotation, he said; "There are to be sure, those who have a quick answer for all these questions. That answer is practically ~~this~~; let humanity be uprooted and let us begin civilization all over again on a different plane by diametrically opposite methods and without the incumbering traditions and ideals which have brought us to the present pass. These revolutionaries feel no need of property, of family, of faith, of God".-- need we quote more to illustrate the methods of propaganda, or to contrast the evasiveness of conservatism with the honesty and frankness of radicalism.

except that I would like to know what

My talks have been the stereotype presentation for fifty years and if there has been anything in them to justify such comment I am serenely unaware of it. Let us look at another of the big Berthas the Rich and Honorable employ to silence the pop-guns of the plain people.

Mr. Felix Morley, associated with the Brookings Institute, and addressing perhaps, half a million people thru fifty-two stations of The National Broadcasting Companies net-work, said with emphasis; "Those who would attribute the present wave of unemployment to a single cause are refuted by abundant evidence" He made no mention of the single cause to which we attribute not only this "unprecedented wave of unemployment"

but the persistent poverty of the masses. He dwelt upon the fact that the lamentable wave of unemployment was universal and enumerated factors so contrasted as to demonstrate that it could not be any one of them that caused it. It prevails, he said" in fascist Italy and in Democratic Great Britain, in over populated Japan and under populated Canada, in agricultural Australia and industrial Germany, in high-tariff Spain and free-trade Holland," and of quote, and he might have added that it afflicted the black and the white, the fat and the lean to make a more ^{of justice} abundant evidence. His presentation was identical with that of the man who claimed the hen laid golden eggs and as evidence displayed the hen.

Having thus disclosed that the cause they profess to seek was not this, that or the other, he announced an educational course arranged to have this, that and the other thoroughly discussed by conspicuous economists, outlining a program designed to reassure his audience that the best minds in the world were sizzling with zeal to discover the cause of unemployment.

His discussion made no reference to poverty but persistently dwelt upon the unemployment that prevailed, because the producers had created so much and so many things they were in need of that those who actually had them could absorb no more. It is the aim and endeavor of all science and invention to reduce the labor of production -- to make less work and less employment in the satisfaction of our needs and desires-- and it is poverty, not unemployment, we should lament and eliminate. Except in countries we call civilized there is no

lack of employment. In his own needs and the wants of those dependent upon him every man finds ample demand for labor. It must therefore be some economic adjustment that prevails in all the countries named that precipitated this "unemployment of unprecedented extent" and if he had named one single economic adjustment that is identical in all the various countries affected, it would have suggested a search for the truth.

Wherever the Rich and Honorable are permitted to hold land out of use, idle and unproductive there will always be unemployment because access to land is necessary to employment.

I once heard a president say; "We must treat labor fairly" and my thought was that if labor treated itself fairly there would be some point to the old observation; "God help the rich, the poor can work". The protection of the masses has at all times been the pretext of tyranny, the plea of monarchy of special privilege of every sort, and it will be a step in the right direction when we eliminate any discussion about what "we" should do for "them" which should have been discontinued on the Fourth of July, 1776. ~~The Rich and Honorable, in countries visited by revolution have always found occasion to complain about what "they" did to "us"~~

The plain people outnumber the Rich and Honorable a thousand to one and they must match their nickels and dimes against the great donations to propagandas and display the truth, which will put righteousness into legislation and prosperity into our affairs and I would array the honest against the dishonest, the sincere

against the hypocrites, the truth-tellers against the propagandists, and, altho there would be innumerable exceptions, the Plain People against the Rich and Honorable -- because we cannot find our way to economic reform thru the forces that have made economic reform necessary.