

## CHAPTER 12

# JOSEPH, SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE

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**L**ONG, LONG before Freud, a fellow named Joseph got himself a reputation as an interpreter of dreams. So, when all the Ph.D.'s of Egypt failed him, Pharaoh sent for this wizard and put to him the puzzler that had come out of his subconscious mind one night—something about seven lean kine and seven fat ones.

A biographical note on this Joseph is in order. Even as a lad he had shown himself endowed of special gifts, winning preferment in his father's eyes over a parcel of brothers. This aroused the envy and resentment of the fraternity—who probably considered Joseph a violation of the principle that all men are created equal—and they contrived to restore parity in mediocrity by getting him out of circulation. By devious circumstances he was landed into the service of Poti-

phar, a bigwig of Egypt, which was a long way from home.

One so clever could not be denied. He rose rapidly to head foremanship of Potiphar's estate. At this point, his career was almost cut short by the perfidy of a woman; that is to say, Potiphar's wife (probably a homely one who was "misunderstood" by her spouse) tried to seduce said Joseph, was repulsed, and, like a scorned female, framed her jilter. Potiphar dumped Joseph into jail.

It was here that Joseph came into his own. Among his fellow inmates were two who were bothered with dream problems. Joseph applied himself to these riddles and untwisted them with uncanny exactitude. This was remembered by one of the prisoners who, on his release, hired out to the Pharaoh household, and, when he heard that his master was deep in subconscious troubles, he recommended the diviner of the dungeon deep.

That is how Joseph came to be called to the palace. Realizing that an unpresentable psychiatrist is without prestige, he slicked himself up, even shaved off the insignia of his tribe, and offered his services to the troubled Administration. Quickly he came up with the answer. There was nothing to it. The dream, he said, indicated clearly that Egypt was about to experience the well-known business cycle, sometimes called "boom and bust." How did he know? The knowledge came to him by divine revelation, he said, which was far more reliable than the wisdom of the Harvard school of economics.

At this point, and while Pharaoh was flabbergasted into speechlessness by the positiveness of his prediction, Joseph showed his true mettle. He threw in a plan. True, he said, the seven years' boom was sure to come upon the realm, but the bust was not so inevitable; Jehovah could be cheated out of it by the simple device of laying up a reserve during the years of plenty. To execute that job Pharaoh would have to

dig up a capable Secretary of Agriculture. The plan and the secretaryship had nothing to do with the riddle he had been called in to unravel, but Joseph tossed it off anyway, and was about to bow himself out.

It occurred to Pharaoh, however, that a mind that had all the answers ought not to languish in Potiphar's jail. So, on the very spot—confirmation by the Senate was quite unnecessary in those days—he appointed the surprised Joseph to be his Secretary of Agriculture. There being no Constitution to swear by, and no Bible to kiss, Pharaoh made the appointment stick by putting his own signet ring on Joseph's hand and a solid gold chain around his neck. For lack of an automobile, an official chariot was assigned to the new dignitary. No doubt, though the chronicle does not record it, Joseph must have a big office to work from, with a lot of assistants and secretaries, for mention is made of many overseers.

Henceforth, Joseph had no need to interpret dreams; he was an administrator, with a plan to carry out. Since the economy was completely agricultural, his position made him the real boss of the country, the top commissar. The first thing he did was to pass laws; without them no plan can work. And the first law on his agenda was, quite naturally, a tax-law. One-fifth of all that these profligate farmers should produce, during the years of plenty, must be taken from them and put under lock and key. It is reported that this 20 percent income tax yielded quite an amount; the grain piled up "as sand of the sea," and undoubtedly there was a shortage of bins, barns and elevators, for "it was without number."

In due time, as per prophecy, the depression came. It is not certain whether this calamity was caused by overproduction or underconsumption, and at that time the learned professors had not yet discovered the sun-spot theory or even

the velocity theory of money. The magicians of that day were without benefit of postgraduate courses in economics. The tale, as we get it, refers to a "famine" but we are not informed whether the shortage was due to drought, pestilence or other unforeseeable accident, or, perhaps to the constant sapping of the economy by seven years of heavy taxation. From what follows in the story, it is quite possible that the dream-planner might have anticipated the consequence of his taxing scheme: the abject subservience of the Egyptian proletariat.

At any rate, hunger was upon the land of Pharaoh. And the people came to the Secretary of Agriculture and begged him to return the grain he had taken from them. Did he shell out? Of course he did, and at a price. He took their money, and when they had no more money he took their cattle. "And Joseph gave them bread in exchange for their horses, and for their flocks, and for their herds, and for their asses: and he fed them bread in exchange for all."

Still the hunger was upon the people, which was natural, for their capital was all gone, and without capital there is little production. As we know now, state capitalism had set in under Joseph's wise regime, and there was nothing for the hungry masses to do but apply for jobs to the state, at the only wage that it was pleased to pay, which was subsistence. They offered themselves as "servants unto Pharaoh" in exchange for bread. "Then Joseph said unto the people: 'Behold I have brought you this day and your land for Pharaoh: lo, here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land.'" In common parlance that means that he had nationalized the land and the labor of Egypt.

The dream-plan worked wonders—for Pharaoh and his Secretary of Agriculture. There is reason to believe, however, that some of the proletariat were perturbed over a moral principle: the right of a man to his property. The chronicle

does not mention this matter, but it does speak of a migration of farmers from one end of the land to another, by Joseph's orders. Could it be that the slaves revolted? Could it be that Joseph resorted to the well-known migratory purge? There is no statement to that effect, but neither is there an explanation for the shifting of the population, and in the absence of explanatory comment one may surmise.

On the other hand, it is told how a delegation of Egyptians came to Joseph and declared: "Thou hast saved our lives: let us find favor in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants." Showing that the proletariat had come to terms with collectivism (since that was the only way to get by in this world) and were content with whatever security the Secretary would provide. Joseph, however, had to make some concession to private property, perhaps to encourage more taxable production; he restored to some of the Egyptians the land he had taken from them in their adversity, on a rental basis. The rent? One-fifth of all the annual output. By this well-timed act of policy, informs historian Flavius Josephus, "Joseph established his own authority in Egypt and increased the standing revenue of all its succeeding monarchs."

Though the succeeding monarchs and the succeeding commissars did well under the plan introduced by Joseph, it seems (according to later historians) that it put upon the proletarians a moral blight, so that when conquerors from other lands came to Egypt they met with little resistance; those who had nothing to lose had nothing to fight for. So that even the monarchs had to beg the invaders for administrative jobs. And lots of dust fell on the civilization of Pharaoh.

Four thousand years later, give or take a century or two, there was a land called America. It was ruled by a President,

which was an office attained by a complex system of parties and votes. At the time under consideration the Presidency was occupied by a person called Harry Truman, about whom little was known except that he too had a dream: farmers who should wax wealthy without working, urban toilers who should feed well without paying.

Truth is, the dream was induced by intense political pre-occupation. Having been thrust into pre-eminence by the Democratic Party, a peculiarly fractious sect, he was in duty bound to strengthen and perpetuate its clutch on the tax-fund of the nation. Now, as has been noted, rulership in this land was dependent on votes. They were a strange people, these Americans, in that they loved to flavor their gross practicality with the ambrosia of idealism. However, the fact remains they voted according to their gastronomic contentment or disorder, as the case may be.

Well, the aforesaid dream perturbed the ruler of the Americans very much. He spoke of it often and loudly, especially when he was pleading for another term of employment. Finally he too called upon the Secretary of Agriculture, one yclept Brannan, to decipher for him this manna-from-heaven fantasy. This dignitary, it is recorded, replied: "It's a cinch, boss, I could bust this riddle on the spot, but I'd rather take a day or two to put the answer into protocol, for the sake of appearance, and to lend it a coat of erudition I'll call in a couple of fellows who majored in economics. Got to do it right, you know."

Shortly thereafter the Secretary handed the President a screed, which in those days was called a legislative bill, embodying not only the solution of his subconscious conundrum but also a plan for putting its purport into execution. The dream signified, said the Secretary, that the farmers must be won to the sacred Democratic Party by assuring them of high prices for their products, and the proletarians

of the cities by providing them with cheap edibles. "It can be done. All we need is a plan. I have it all here, in the form of a bill, and if you can get that do-nothing Congress to put the ok on it, you can leave the rest to me!" The President was pleased.

The first thing called for in the plan was an appropriation for an enforcement agency, which in itself would provide an easy living for a goodly number of loyal Democrats. That was fine. Then, a schedule of production would be presented to the farmers; in effect, they would be told when, how and what they should produce. Farmers who produced more than their allotments would be fined, those who complied would be rewarded with subsidies. This control over production would enable the bureaucrats to fix the prices, regardless of cost and demand. The city dwellers, particularly in the months preceding election time, would obtain their strawberries and cream at practically nothing, for which they would be grateful to their benefactors, while subsidies to farmers who did not produce would similarly bind them to the party.

Of course, there will have to be taxes, continued the Secretary, for how else can the scheme operate? "But, as you know, boss, the voters never associate gratuities with taxation. The farmers and artisans, if they mention the matter at all, will be told that the 'rich' pay all the taxes, and that will satisfy them. The checks we send the farmers will more than offset the distemper caused by levies on their incomes, and the housewife's glee at the low price of cabbage will overcome the chagrin of payroll deductions."

At first the Brannan Plan met with little favor among American farmers, who, though they had to rub along with an average of less than two automobiles to the family, were rather satisfied with "parity" handouts and were suspicious of any change in the status. A few years later, however, the

depression came upon the country, and in quick order there was a mad demand for controlled production and for prices fixed by political exigency. The Truman dream, like that of Pharaoh, came into its own by way of a plan.

It goes without saying that the eventual outcome of the Brannan Plan was not unlike that of Joseph's. Once the overseers of the Department of Agriculture got control of the farmers and the lands of America, there was no way of returning to the regime of private ownership; there was no inclination to, for the farmers were quite content to swap the hazards of their trade for the subsistence doled out to them by the bureaucrats. The city dwellers, likewise, managed to live and have children under the regime of fixed income and regulated prices. Nobody yearned for more (except a few recalcitrants who were soon made to see the error of their ways), nobody cared for change. In fact, with aspirations limited, nobody cared about anything. And the American civilization went the way of the Egyptian.