

For Predation There Must Be Production

By HARRY GUNNISON BROWN

We appear to be living in an era of tremendous upheaval the ultimate consequences of which no one can foresee. Economic systems are in flux. Political systems are changing rapidly. The centers of military power and of prestige are shifting as they have not before in generations. Can it possibly be that the relative fairness of different economic systems has some causal significance in such changes and so in the rise and fall of nations and of empires?

The world of man, like the world of life generally, is a world of struggle and of rivalry. There is rivalry and struggle between individuals and there is rivalry and struggle between groups. There is ceaseless conflict of antagonistic interests, each seeking the maximum of gain and the minimum of loss. Nations take by force and fraud from other nations. Individuals, by cheating and by force, take from other individuals. Particular economic groups within each country undertake to control government and, as readers of *The Freeman* well know, bend it to their uses in abstracting wealth from other groups and from the public generally.

Yet in the midst of all this taking or predation, there continues to be production, else there would be little or nothing for the predators to take. Always a large proportion of the people produce wealth. Thus we have commonly in human society the two inconsistent activities of production and predation,—although these may appear to be in one sense consistent with each other, viz., as divergent aspects of the struggle for existence.

In Lord Dunsany's play, "King Argimenes and the Unknown Warrior," a new prophet is called to the throne hall by King Darniak to entertain his Queens. But these are the prophet's ominous words:

"There was once a King that had slaves to hate him and to toil for him, and he had soldiers to guard him and to die for him. And the number of the slaves that he had to

hate him and to toil for him was greater than the number of the soldiers that he had to guard and to die for him. And the days of that King were few. And the number of thy slaves, O King, that thou hast to hate thee is greater than the number of thy soldiers. Thine armies camped upon thy mountainous borders descry no enemy in the plains afar. And within thy gates lurks he for whom thy sentinels seek upon lonely guarded frontiers. There is a fear upon me and a boding. Even yet there is time, even yet; but little time. And my mind is dark with trouble for thy kingdom."

Is it not probably true, in general, except as those who are exploited are too utterly uncomprehending, that revolution or revolt is likely in proportion as the exploited are numerous, as well as in proportion to the degree of their resentment.

It is obvious, of course, that the degree of this resentment may be lessened if the exploited majority can be persuaded, however fallaciously, that they are not being exploited and that, instead, the exploiting policies are calculated to increase their prosperity and happiness. Nevertheless, the waste and poverty and inequality which exploitation brings about, even though cause and effect relations are little understood by the victims, are hardly conducive to satisfaction and contentment.

A master class of conquerors or aristocrats may live among those it exploits and may by force, or by teaching subservience and a "morality" of privilege and subjection, maintain itself for generations in a parasitic position. But any great discontent among the exploited must

surely weaken this master class in conflict with alien enemies. If the exploited group has to be kept down by force or if, even, it does not enthusiastically support the régime through which it is exploited, the chance of overthrow of the dominating aristocratic class is enhanced.

If the inhabitants of a country are to have the best chance of successfully resisting foreign attack, they need, it would seem, a unity of spirit which certainly is not furthered by exploitation. In short, that country is strong, in conflict with those who would conquer it, whose people feel that they have an economic system which gives a fair chance to all, and which therefore, is well worth fighting for. But what ruling caste is willing to give up its privileges even to make its people strong in war?

Or are we rather to conclude that the way for a nation to be strong is to maintain a highly privileged caste which lives parasitically upon the masses and which will fight eagerly to maintain its privileges against foreign foes who may seek to displace it? And are we to conclude, also, that such a privileged caste can, by its prestige and its propaganda, develop almost as great enthusiasm among the exploited masses for the waging of foreign wars as if these exploited masses were fighting for themselves instead of to keep in power over them and to further aggrandize a particular set of exploiters!

Survival in the struggle for existence does not mean that the survivor is perfectly adapted to his environment. On the average and in the long run it may indeed mean that he is least ill adapted. If we are to be accurate we must say "on the average" because particular and peculiar or "accidental" circumstances may sometimes eliminate an individual relatively well adapted to the conditions which have to be met ordinarily.

Similarly, survival of a group in



the competition of war or otherwise does not mean that the group is the best or strongest imaginable. It may mean, in the long run and on an average, that the surviving group is least ill adapted to the conditions to be met.

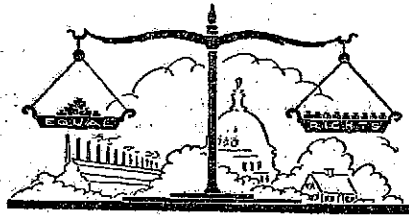
We must frankly admit, of course, that even a perfectly fair economic system can not at all guarantee the survival of a group which fails to meet every other test of adaptation. Nevertheless, an economic system in which the majority are discontented and greatly exploited hosts of a parasitic few or in which burglary, pocket picking and highway robbery are so extensively practiced that security is reduced to a minimum and general discontent and disorganization prevail,—such an economic system must tend not towards the survival of the society but towards its elimination.

In the struggles of the present century, have the so-called democratic countries had an economic system so fair, so favorable to the common run of folks, so devoid of all elements of parasitism, as to call out the maximum of enthusiasm on the part of these common folks in its defense? Can we say, for example, that Great Britain, with the descendants of feudal lords and of royal favorites owning a large part of the island, including large sections of some of the cities, has such an economic system? Do the common people of Britain, who must pay many millions of British pounds every year to those who own the island, for permission to work on it and to live on it, have real reason to enthuse over their economic system and to sacrifice and suffer and die to preserve it as against the rival and alien systems of other states? Would the workers of England, Scotland and Wales necessarily be so much worse off, economically, under German or Italian or Russian domination as the conservative defenders of the prevailing parasitism would have them believe?

What if the Germans did really intend to liberate the British masses from their present exploitation! What if in Germany itself the annual value of sites and natural re-

sources were definitely regarded as belonging to all the people! What if German leaders were to pledge themselves to the common folk of Britain to introduce the same system there, so that no one in Britain any longer should be able to gain a living by charging his fellow Britons for permission to work on and to live on their island or draw mineral wealth from its sub-surface deposits! There seems, indeed, no present possibility of any such appeal being made at all and, certainly, no prospect of its being made convincingly. But the time may come when some potentially conquering nation will be able to make this kind of appeal. What then?

How largely is the willingness to fight, in modern war, the result, on both sides, of a sporting instinct—the desire to have "our team" win? How largely is it the result of effective propaganda which



makes the enemy look relatively much worse than he is? And how largely is it the consequence of a truly intelligent comprehension of the comparative advantages of different economic systems notwithstanding each and all of them may fall far short of the requirements of efficiency and fairness?

Some rules of fairness, some standards conducing to security, some recognition of the claims of producers to at least a modicum of what they produce appears to be necessary if there is to be any community life at all, if there is to be any specialization, any exchange, indeed any productive activity. Conceivably these rules and standards will be only such as the strength of each producer can enforce against each would-be predator. Or possibly those who wish to produce will always, sooner or later, realize that they have a common interest and

will so inevitably learn to combine in some fashion or other so as to limit the predation of men who would live at their expense. Or the recognition of the rights of others and the requisite sympathy to implement this recognition, which develops in the family, may extend further so as to affect relations, among neighbors, among fellow citizens of a national, even, among citizens of different nations. Possibly natural selection, in weeding out groups whose members cannot seem to co-operate effectively, has helped to evolve a type of mentality capable of a larger degree of social sympathy and not merely of more intelligent self interest. And no doubt the appeals and preachments of those who first and least unclearly realized the need of rules and standards, have had some effect in bringing other men to their support and in introducing sanctions, such as fines, jail and capital punishment, which may add still further to the observance of the rules and standards accepted. Indeed it may often happen that even an exploiting group—e.g., slave owners or landowners—will join wholeheartedly in popularizing and enforcing standards and principles which are directed against every important kind of exploitation except that—or those—through which their own class profits. For if the stealing of others from producers is effectively prevented, their own exploitive gains will also be more secure.

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