

the Henry George News

PUBLISHED BY HENRY GEORGE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE • JUNE, 1958

Free Trade and International Peace

by JAMES L. BUSEY

THE advocates of free trade commonly argue that elimination of barriers to commerce would facilitate prosperity, and that the resultant improvement in world economic conditions would contribute to maintenance of peace.

I should like to add what I consider to be a compelling *political* reason for advocating unhampered commerce as a bulwark to preservation of peace and security.

The national state lies at the very heart of the international problems of peace and war. Periodicals are full of references to Great Britain, France, the U.S.S.R., the U.S.A., the United Arab Republic, Argentina, and so forth. These names of national states are bandied about with the greatest air of familiarity. Yet national states are seldom analyzed or understood in a profound sense. They are things that are forever being talked about, but are seldom given careful

thought.

To understand national states and the international relations which prevail among them, we must conceive of the world as existing in a pattern

of political anarchy. In this maelstrom of international lawlessness, each national state tries to secure its "national interest" as determined by itself. Such "national interest" is likely to be defined by the one, few or many who run the national state in terms of

their own political security and economic well-being, but seldom if ever in terms of the general betterment of mankind.

As long as the national state is the star performer in a world of international lawlessness, there will be wars and rumors of wars. Until the roles of national states can somehow be markedly reduced, peace must remain a hope, a dream, an aspiration, but a shibboleth.

14th ANNUAL CONFERENCE
HENRY GEORGE SCHOOL
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National states are defined by their boundaries as well as by their governments. Governments provide needed functions; but boundaries provide the lines of cleavage between individual national states, and are basic to the continuance of international chaos. As long as boundaries remain relatively impassable, national sovereign states must continue to perform as individual, competing entities divided by deep gulfs of misunderstanding, prejudice and separate interest. It is the impermeable character of boundaries that makes states both *national* and *sovereign*.

It seems hopeless to try to prevail upon the states of the world to agree to the reduction of their boundary functions in any real sense; and it is well known that no national state is going to unilaterally adopt any proposals which will tend to weaken its position in relationship to other national states. "The lamb thinks one thing, the wolf another."

Here is the point where the United States is in a position to take unilateral action toward the preservation of peace and simultaneously strengthen its own security. The United States—or any other country, for that matter—can



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begin at its own frontiers. A reduction, for example, of the economic barriers which prevail between ourselves and Mexico and Canada would begin the long process of reducing the danger of war and at the same time would even add to the security of the participants. This is a development which can be begun at home and then extended outward in all directions without any need to rely either on frustrating international negotiations or on complex, bureaucratic international organization. Once a large country such as the United States

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Considered an expert on Latin American political affairs, he was quoted recently in the Rocky Mountain News of Denver as discounting the report that recent discourtesies to the Nixons were the actions of Communists. He feels the visitors were unwittingly the victims of centuries of mounting rage against oppressors, and believes this incident proves how unprepared this country is for responsibility and leadership. "We don't seem to know that a frightening majority of the population of the countries south of the Rio Grande are filled with a boiling enmity, an incalculable hatred, against their political and economic rulers," he said.

Dr. Busey is the editor of the recently condensed Progress and Poverty booklet now available from Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 50 East 69th Street, New York, at 15¢ a copy, from HGN.

begins lowering its own barriers on its immediate frontiers, its neighbors are likely to follow suit, and a chain reaction be initiated. A North American free trade area would go a long way toward reducing political cleavages on this continent, and would undoubtedly be expanded into South America and into the North Atlantic area of Europe.

It is here, then, that the argument for free trade can be turned into a *political* contention. The inauguration of free trade, beginning at home, can serve as a substantial contribution to the modification of the national state, but in a pattern of enhanced security for all who contribute to the effort.

The cartoon at the right was made for us by Elaine Wener of New York. She is an active member of the alumni group and recently exhibited some of her paintings at the Henry George School.

