

Solving the Colonial Riddle

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The demand for colonies is today in the forefront of world questions. On the one hand, we have France, Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Portugal, with huge colonial possessions, each wishing to maintain the status quo. On the other, there are Italy, Germany and Japan, possessing little colonial territory and making it quite plain, even to the extent of war or threats of war, that they insist on getting colonies. In this connection the term "colonies," of course, does not include any of the self-governing Dominions of the British Commonwealth, each of which is juridically an independent nation.

The countries which have colonies, the "Haves," are in an invidious position when called upon to reply to the claims of the "Have-nots." It does not lie in the mouths of the Haves to say that it is in the interests of the inhabitants of their colonies, that they should continue to administer them, because their administration is better than would be that of the Have-nots. The Have-nots are unlikely to accept that as true.

Of very few colonies can it be said that they are administered in the interests of the original inhabitants or even of the newcomers who have settled there. The number of nationals of the possessing country, who settle in its colonies, is relatively insignificant and the actual amount of trade with them is really not important. The persons to whom colonies are a source of income are chiefly those who can profit from the colonies' natural resources and from the work of their peoples.

The main reason advanced to support the claim for colonies is overpopulation. In all the Have and Have-not countries there is an artificially created overpopulation, because in each of them land monopoly prevents the mass of the people from getting access to land.

The reason given by the Japanese for their attack, first on Manchuria and now on North China, is the over-

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population of their country and the poverty of their people. It is claimed that Japan must have foreign outlets for its people. Actually, the density of population in Japan is little more than half that of Belgium and only half that of England.

The "Japan Year Book 1936" shows that one half of the arable land in Japan is owned by 1,000,000 people, that is, about 1½ per cent of the total population, while some 33,000,000 get their living on rented agricultural land; and, of these, 20,000,000 are compelled to try to exist on approximately one acre per household. Not only must they pay a higher rent for that small area but they are also heavily taxed. It is this that causes the poverty and all the so-called overcrowding or overpopulation of Japan. The cure for those evils and the lack of markets for the Japanese people lies in their remedying that situation.

The position in Italy is closely comparable to that of Japan. Overpopulation in Italy was given as the main reason for the attack by that country on Abyssinia. The Fascist "Annuario Statistico," for the year 1935, published the official Roman statistics concerning the distribution of the soil of Italy. It showed that 2,478,412 Italians possess altogether 15,486,452 hectares of cultivated land; 12,490 Italians, or ½ of 1 per cent of those owners possess 7,049,-

682 hectares, or 47 per cent of all the cultivated land of Italy, and almost as much as the remaining 2,465,922 Italian agrarian producers put together.

The figures in respect of Germany are quite similar.

In Great Britain, the monopolization of land in the hands of a few is notorious. Twenty-five land owners in Scotland claim to own one third of the whole of Scotland. It was said recently that in one glen, from among the inhabitants of which Wolfe, in the middle of the eighteenth century, raised a whole regiment of fighting men for Quebec, there is now only one family, that of a gamekeeper.

Because of these conditions, there is overcrowding which is purely artificial and wholly unnecessary. They have brought about a state of affairs in which an extension of exploitation of the masses of the people is no longer easily possible in the home land, and the exploiters in each of these European countries and Japan must look abroad for some other people to use for profit.

For the European countries, Africa is the continent where the inhabitants are least able to protect themselves. The greed of each exploiter makes him envy the possessions of the others, and the jealousy inspired by the possession of such opportunities as are presented to them in African colonies makes for strife between them. While these territories are allowed to be held as colonies, a possible cause for disputes between the great Western European nations remains. Especially is this so wherever narrow national rivalry is added to the aggressive commercialism of the individual exploiters.

Do not the facts here set out indicate that there is no need for colonies for any of the European countries or Japan? Each country has ample natural resources to supply its own needs directly from its own soil or by exchanging its products for those of other countries. They do not really need foreign land and the



amount of benefit their entire peoples would get in trade, through the mere fact of their owning colonies, is negligible. In every one of those countries, as well as in the Have countries, the home market could be developed enormously, if the people were set free to work for themselves without having to pay heavy rents to their land monopolists.

No one of the Have or Have-not countries has yet shown any sign of willingness to tackle its own internal problem of land monopolization, but each seems willing to risk plunging the world into another war rather than to do so.

The problem, of course, is complicated by claims of national prestige. This can only be settled by the Haves giving up their position of superiority as colonial powers and abandoning any claim to possess colonies. Any advantages which it may be claimed accrue to the inhabitants of colonial territories through their connection with the possessing country can be given to them by a united control, similar to that already exercised by the League of Nations over several portions of other countries. The Haves and Have-nots could, from the point of view of prestige, join in helping the present colonial territories to be run in the genuine interest of their inhabitants.

The selfishness which is represented in exploitation and land monopoly, with its resultant trade tariff barriers, will not be surrendered without a great moral struggle. The remedy—apart from the breaking of the power of the internal land monopoly—seems to require a definite decision on the part of the Haves to give up any possessive claims over their colonies, and their agreement that these territories will be administered, as far as possible, by their own inhabitants in their own interest. Where they are unable to carry on that administration unaided, assistance should be given jointly by a committee of nations required to act entirely and without reservation in the interests of the inhabitants of the former colonies. There would have to be complete free trade in those territories.

In so far as the Have countries are honest in their claims to be holding their colonies in the interest of the local inhabitants, they could raise no

logical objection to such a scheme and any opposition to it would reveal the fact that exploitation was the true purpose for which they have held such territories. The Have-nots would, if such a proposal were adopted, cease in the eyes of the world to have any cause for complaint or any ground for claiming colonies. They would have as free a right to trade in the present colonial territories as any of the former Haves. There would be no difference in national prestige based upon the possession of colonies. A beginning would be made in the direction of realizing that the inhabitants of colonies are human beings with rights to freedom and independence as such.

Any one of the Have countries could take the course outlined above without having to wait for any or all of the others to fall into line.

A solution short of that would leave open all the causes of possible conflict and war which at present disturb the world. We cannot hope for peace or justice as long as the Haves and Have-nots are struggling with each other for their own aggrandizement. Justice, and justice alone, will solve this problem and, in solving it, as between the Haves and Have-nots, we shall bring hope and real freedom and capacity to progress to the unhappy and oppressed peoples of the world.