

Pure Wreckonomics

By C. O. Steele

Puerto Rico is in trouble and something is going to be done about it—by the Islanders themselves and by their benevolent Uncle Samuel. Puerto Rican officials announce that an effort is to be made to enforce the law limiting corporate ownership of land to 500 acres. Labor is being robbed by a small number of large land holding corporations; henceforth the law will see to it that labor is robbed by a large number of small ones. It is all a little foggy—like calling grand larceny a crime and petty larceny legitimate business—but no doubt it will be a great help to labor.

Secretary Ickes is going to do his part with a \$50,000,000 Insular Reconstruction Corporation that is to wipe out unemployment and make every one prosperous and happy, just like we are at home, where we have been reconstructed from AAA to WPA, with the happy result that unemployment has been reduced, in the short space of only four or five years and at a cost of only four or five billion dollars, from 11,000,000 to 10,999,999.

The newspapers are doing their part, too, bless them. The trouble with Puerto Rico, so the New York Times gravely informs us, is that it is too thickly inhabited, the density of population being 449 to the square mile. And Mr. Walter Lippmann, though not writing of Puerto Rico, makes it doubly clear that population is a curse. In his Thanksgiving Day column in New York Herald Tribune, Mr. Lippmann explains, if he does not condone, the brutal aggression of Italy and Germany against helpless countries, and racial minorities by attributing it to the pressure of population. There can be no permanent peace, he says, unless other lands consent to absorb a million or so human beings annually, of Europe's surplus population.

Thus we have one vote for more and smaller robbers, one vote for a more-abundant-life miracle and two votes for race suicide. No one voted

for an understanding and application of economic principles.

The population of Germany, before her recent attempt to relieve the pressure by seizure of an unoffending neighboring country of almost equal density of population, was 324 to the square mile, while that of Italy is 349. But in Belgium and Holland, models of peace and prosperity by comparison, the density is almost double, being 698 and 610 to the square mile respectively. England's population is 742 to the square mile, while happy little Bermuda, where unemployment and abject poverty are almost unknown, basks in the sun with more than 1,400 persons to the square mile. Coming to our own states, we find New Jersey has 491 to the square mile and no fault is found except that Mayor Hague is one of them; Massachusetts numbers 514 to the square mile and Rhode Island 550. Should these countries and states take a page out of Hitler's book, or should they speak to Mr. Ickes about it?

The ills of the world are plentiful enough but they are not due to overpopulation. In no country has growth of population been as rapid as advance in the arts of production. Compared with its capacity to support human life, the world is greatly underpopulated. There are not many of us. Hendrik Van Loon says that

all the people on the globe could be stuffed into a packing case measuring only half a mile in each direction. No country ever had more people than it could support. No country ever had any people unless it could produce something needed for the gratification of human desires—people don't go to such countries. Being able to produce some needful thing, it is in effect, through the exchangeability of wealth, capable of producing all needful things. Men in their stupidity make trade difficult or impossible by the erection of artificial barriers, just as they foolishly countenance private ownership in land. These are the things that cause economic distress, not overpopulation.

Henry George says, "That amid our highest civilization men faint and die with want is not due to the niggardliness of nature, but to the injustice of man. Vice and misery, poverty and pauperism, are not the legitimate results of the increase of population and industrial development; they only follow increase of population and industrial development because land is treated as private property—they are the direct and necessary results of the violation of the supreme law of justice, involved in giving to some men the exclusive possession of that which nature provides for all men."