

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

"Tasks for Giants"—Now and After the War

THE FOLLOWING illuminating article by Mr F. A. W. Lucas, K.C., appeared in the July issue of *The Free People*, Johannesburg. It is a diagnosis of the evils from which all countries are suffering.

In the screen picture, "Men of Boys' Town," the leading character, Father Flannagan, addressing the boys who are about to leave the "town," said to them that they were going out into a world where they would be faced with "tasks for giants." The mess in which we find ourselves to-day is ample proof of the rightness of that statement. In every country, whether it is directly engaged in the war or not, there are problems which call for giants for their solution, giants in character and giants in integrity. When the war is over we shall have those problems to solve and also that of removing for ever the causes of war. Have we got the giants of character and integrity to undertake that task?

Both the tasks we ought to be facing now and those which we shall have to face in an aggravated form after war, arise from the poverty and fear of want which are the lot of the great mass of the people everywhere. Unless we solve this problem these evils, serious as they are now, will be enormously greater as a result of the war.

If we analyse the causes of war, we see at once that they lie in the poverty of the masses which arises from exploitation and monopoly. Fascism and Nazism are merely symptoms of a deep discontent among the peoples of different countries with their lot of poverty. Henry George foretold, more than sixty years ago, in *Progress and Poverty*, that unscrupulous men would arise and lead their peoples to deeds of bloody violence, if the prevailing poverty in the presence of great riches and of opportunities of abounding wealth was not ended. That is exactly what has happened in most countries in Europe.

That Hitler and Mussolini were able to achieve power by playing on the poverty and unemployment of their peoples there can be no doubt. Those leaders could play on the nationalist feelings of their peoples to persuade them to get ready for war and to agree to a policy of guns before butter. Under the widespread belief, which Sir Norman Angell's "The Great Illusion" did little to dispel, that victory in war would mean riches and an end to their poverty, they were willing that they should be led into war.

Mussolini wanted Abyssinia and Albania and Hitler wanted Austria, Czecho-Slovakia, and Poland so that their industrialists could have enlarged territories within which they could sell their goods without the interference of foreign customs tariffs. It was for the same reason that they clamoured for colonies and the British and the French wanted to keep theirs.

The ordinary man and woman in any country could gain nothing from accessions of territory or from getting colonies. But when the exploiters, who would gain from them, could make the poor people of their nations believe that they too would gain, and that it was the overbearing French or British who stood in the way of their improving their lot, it was easy to stir up hatred and a willingness to undertake a war with the nations that were the cause of their poverty.

But it is not only in international affairs that poverty can so cause strife. It also brings about the class struggle within a nation. If you can distinguish

a class in the community by some marked characteristic, it is easy to saddle that class with the responsibility for your suffering. In this way we get colour bars, anti-Semitism, and racialism. It is easy for the poor Afrikaans-speaking relief workers to believe Mr Pirow is right when he tells them their poverty is due to their exploitation by the Jew or the Englishman, and that such exploitation can be stopped only by the establishment of a republic in the Union.

By this combination of an appeal to their nationalist emotions with the appeal to their economic self-interest, Mr Pirow is now, because nothing is done by the Government to end poverty here, getting much support for a "Pirow-crazy" as against democracy.

Thus we get Pirovian New Orders, an Ossewa-Brandwag and an Herenigde Party, all built up on racial or nationalist hatred. None of those movements has any programme which could in any way help to end poverty for the mass of our people. The most they would do would be to provide a new set of jobs for a new set of pals.

We cannot end race hatred or race oppression unless we end the poverty which nourishes them. That must be done regardless of the racial composition of any section of our people. If Mr Pirow got his new order and was able to divest the English-speaking section of our population of all semblance of control in industry or any of our public activities, would any large part of the Afrikaans-speaking section be any better off than they are now? Even if we assume that the general prosperity level of business did not suffer by the removal of English-speaking managers and foremen, what would the Afrikaans-speaking rank and file gain from the change? Would their new employer, just because he spoke their language, pay them any higher wages than he was bound to? Would an Afrikaans-speaking landlord charge them any less in rent than any other landlord? Would an Afrikaans-speaking grocer ask any less for sugar or meal than a grocer whose home language was English?

Obviously then, with any changes there were in the form of our government, it would still be necessary to solve the overriding problem which is that of poverty. It is there that the tasks for giants lie. They have nothing to do with questions of the racial origin of any of us. The problem is one of bread and butter. We all need food and clothing and shelter whatever may be our home language.

The great task we have to face, whether we are giants or not, the task which involves the interests of the mass of our people, the task on the performance of which depends whether we are ever to end racialism in this country and live in peace, is the ending of poverty, exploitation, and monopoly. If we do not carry out that task then both the white and the black races of this country will be doomed, though the blacks will probably have a greater chance of survival than the whites.

The task of ending poverty in our country is not an impossible one nor is it even a difficult one, if only we were determined to undertake it. The important step that is needed is that of destroying land monopoly. To the ordinary townsman such a proposition may sound far-fetched and unreal, but a little consideration will show its correctness.

We are all land animals. We live on land. We

work in or on land. We farm land. We mine land. We build on land. Everything we use, everything we eat, drink, wear, work with or play with, comes from the land, when we work to produce it. Whether we live in a town or in the country, whether we work in an office or a mine, on a railway or a farm, we are dependent for our work, our necessities, our very existence, on land. To be able to exist, then, we must have access to land. But that is just what we may not have, because our system of land monopoly says we may not be on land to live there or to work there, unless we first buy permission from some landowner to be there. We thus have to buy a landowner's permission to live or work. His price is everything he can extract from us and is continually rising with each new public service and each new useful invention. The land monopolist grows rich while he sleeps and without doing any service in return for his riches.

It is thus easy to see the close connection which land monopoly has with the daily life of each one of us. The task before us is to break that monopoly. How can it be done?

It can be done by extending our Johannesburg site value rating system to its logical limit to all the land in the country, including farming, mining, industrial, and other urban land. If every holder of land were required to pay to the community the full rent of his land, no one would be able for long to hold more land than he could use and so all the unused land we see around us to-day would become available for use by builders, miners, farmers or industrialists. There would then be an unlimited number of jobs of all kinds and so wages would rise.

But not only that. The revenue which we should receive in this way would be far greater than our present revenue, so that we should be able to provide far better services than we have to-day and at the same time abolish all kinds of taxes. Thus there would be work for all at good wages.

To achieve that is the task before us. It does not really require us to be giants to do it, except in so far as we need to be giants to use our votes sensibly and effectively. The moment a majority of our voters make up their minds to demand the remedy for poverty and unemployment we can get it, but not till then.

What we ask you to do is to think over our proposals and, if you are satisfied, as we feel you cannot help being, that they are sound, to get your friends interested in them. Each one can help in this way to create the necessary public opinion. A strong public opinion in favour of the remedy would soon make it possible to bring it about.

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POVERTY AND FAMILY ALLOWANCES

WOMEN'S LIBERAL FEDERATION,

23 Gayfere Street, S.W.1.

23rd September, 1941.

To the Editor,

Land & Liberty.

SIR,—In your August issue there is a column on the resolution on Family Allowances submitted by the Women's Liberal Federation to the Liberal Party Assembly on 19th July. The writer in the course of a violent attack questions some of the assertions made by the recommending committee and attributes to them—on no evidence—convictions which are fantastically far from being held by them.

The opening announces that "it was certainly monstrous" to suggest in the draft resolution that children are the chief single cause of poverty. If we were monstrous it was in good company. I would refer the writer to many of the investigations made recently by trained workers and sociologists, e.g., the Merseyside Survey (1929-31), the Sheffield Survey (1933), the Bristol Survey (1937), and the work of Sir John Orr and Mr Seeborn Rowntree. There is remarkable agreement among them that even among workers generally reckoned as well paid the wage adequate for a family where there is one child, becomes inadequate to provide a proper standard of living where there are more. In other words "the greatest single cause of poverty in this country is young children" (Sir William Beveridge in a letter to *The Times*, 12th January, 1940).

The second paragraph in one long breath accuses us of surrendering to "the view that poverty is inevitable and incurable"—the writer's words—and passionately indicts us for wishing by family allowances to remove some of the worst results of the existing poverty which we deplore! Is it an acceptance of poverty to seek to redistribute the wealth of the community to a degree further than is already done by other social legislation? The writer attacks such a redistribution as immoral, "usurping an arbitrary right." Does he then wish the repeal of State Education, Old Age Pensions, Widows' Pensions, Insurance benefits, etc.?

The concluding paragraph describes the writer as baffled by our view that it is not at the moment possible to achieve an increase of wages great enough to meet the demonstrated malnutrition among the children of this country. Mr Colin Clark has estimated that in the last 25 years wages have claimed only an extra 2 per cent of the national income. (cf. *The Case for Family Allowances*, Eleanor F. Rathbone, Penguin Special, p. 43). Moreover it is estimated (*ibid.*, p. 42) that to base a wage on the needs of a family with three dependent children provides for numbers of non-existent children while leaving below the poverty line a group of families including 23 per cent of the children. Family allowances would immediately meet the needs of the actual children at present suffering from malnutrition.

Yours faithfully,

MARGARET DEAS,

Hon Secretary.

(This letter is discussed on another page.—EDITOR,
L. & L.)

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to become a subscriber. Monthly 2d. By Post, 3s.
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