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Prosperity — Security — The Future

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"Prosperity" was the rallying cry of the mechanical-technical development of the past century up to the time of the first World War. It became "Security" during the post-war years up to our own days. "Self-maintenance" may be the motto of the coming decades. The Western countries led by America, whose most progressive representative can no longer believe in a prosperity based upon a constantly enhanced production, seem to think that a timely transformation to such a basis of individual self-maintenance may still save their economic existence. War economy destroys the products of increased activities and will once more prove itself an illusion as a means to economic betterment of any nation. Only with utter slowness does mankind take to the laborious way of looking for spiritual guidance in solving its burning questions.

The impulse of "self-maintenance" can be met, strange though it may seem, in the thoughts of the most varying and frequently contrasting economic systems. All countries have the idea of self-sufficiency in common, at least in the sphere of food, and it is based on the fundamental truth that if one is unable to support oneself, one cannot live and work for others. This is demonstrated in a simple way by developments in agriculture.

An interesting analysis of American conditions by O. E. Baker reaches the conclusion that a self-supporting agriculture offers the only possibility of maintaining the fertility of the soil. Ethnically, this provides new generations for industry and cities; economically, it acts as a stabilizer because properly managed farms are able to exist and pay their taxes in times of economic depression and unemployment. In other words, the agricultural soil capital can then at least defend itself and earn a small yield of interest. Of course, the profits and standard of living are so modest that anyone dependent upon modern economic habits of life can hardly feel attracted to such farming. Nevertheless, it constitutes a progress in comparison with the prosperity-security age, to be able in this way to earn a modest living.

In the United States the return to the self-maintenance principle seems essential for two reasons, namely unemployment and increasing satiety with industrial and city life and the increasing destruction of the soil's fertility, which can only be prevented through creation of small and medium sized mixed farms. Whereas even five years ago authoritative representatives of

agriculture stated that the farmer first of all must make a profit, the Department of Agriculture has now fundamentally changed its view-point. Secretary Wallace announced in December, 1939 (according to the New York Herald-Tribune, December 26th): "The most important change in the program of the Farm Security Administration foresees that no credits will be granted if the farmer asking for credit intends to plant only one cash crop. In this way we hope to popularize the practice of crop rotations and mixed farming in monoculture districts, particularly in the Southern cotton districts. Farms applying soil-protective methods will obtain larger credits."

Western culture has thus reached a turning point. Ever increasing production and technical improvements no longer seem possible. Indeed, it is a question of reduction in order to re-establish proper balance. In biology we recognize "division by reduction," for example—when the eggs mature and new cells are generated, four of these arise to begin with, of which three die, thus leaving sufficient growth substance for the surviving cell.

Growth thus gives rise to new growth, capable of life, after having eliminated everything that is superfluous. We must therefore reckon with the will to live, and with renunciation. What Nature first supplied in abundant measure is taken back again, in order to make room for new things. The forces of expansion and contraction will be observed in ever-rhythmic change. If we wish to make true progress in economic life, we must recognize such forces. The Westerner is here handicapped by mistaken ideals. He is afraid of losing freedom of trade by passing over to an economy based on forms of organic growth; he does not realize that at the present time freedom of trade exists in name only.

The agricultural forces remaining after a "division by reduction" should be led into suitable channels in order to provide for liberated human beings. In the social organism it is not only our duty, but also our right, to find work.

Production must be brought into balance with possibilities of consumption; for it is over-production, with its superfluous needs stimulated artificially through advertising, that has led to the present conditions. The great task of the nearest future will be that of limiting production to actual requirements and at the same time guaranteeing every individual human being an existence worthy of human dignity. In other words, the economic system must be kept going without revolutions, unemployment or other vicissitudes. Many people still shrink from this task; they prefer to leave these problems alone, getting into wars and misery, hoping that things will somehow straighten themselves out.*

*Almost three years ago the writer of this article exposed to the agricultural Director of the French Ministry of Agriculture, Mr. B., the ideas and experiences of bio-dynamic farming and gardening, along the lines of the principles set forth in the above article. The necessities of maintaining the fertility of the soil and of adopting a far-sighted agricultural program were particularly emphasized. Mr. B. replied: "You speak as if you wished to call into life a dynasty of peasants; but what are we to do with those who demand to make a profit and for whose profits we shall be responsible?" Whereupon the author answered: "The fertility of the soil and sound reserves for the existence of mankind must suffer, if you do not adopt a bio-dynamic agricultural program based upon long periods of development. The future of the French nation may really depend upon just that this dynasty of peasants comes into being. If you bear in mind only the immediate profits

A great moral uplift is needed, in every individual and in every nation, in order that everything superfluous be renounced and only what is necessary be demanded. It is obvious that this cannot take place without difficulties. A period of great economic change will be inevitable. Today we can still decide freely whether evolution or revolution shall mould the future. The forces that are now fettered by war will be set free again. Many things will then cease to be produced and many workers will be idle. There will be no golden age and it is wise to begin paving the way for the direction of such forces that will be set free. The self-maintenance principle will then be a necessary expedient, until balance has been established between economic life and the social organism.

The experiences and disappointments connected with the return of the industrial and city-populations to the country gave rise to much criticism. In many cases the negative results were due to lack of agricultural experience. The greatest obstacle was, however, of a psychological nature, namely the unaccustomed simplicity of country life in comparison with city life. As stated, the financial prospects of a self-supporting farmer are not very tempting. He has his home and produces his own food, but outside of that he does not earn very much. Unemployed workmen very often prefer cash Government doles, because the farmer's bare possibilities of income may not be any greater and he has to work very hard. Some other temptation than the financial would therefore be needed. A description of possible future hardships does not induce people to change their way of life. And the change to a self-supporting agricultural life must be preceded by corresponding training and education, for no one can become a farmer or gardener merely by picking up a spade or putting on heavy boots. Another incentive will therefore be needed in order to carry through a permanent agricultural colonization program, thus creating a balance between urban and rural life. What may that incentive be?

The born farmer, with his innate love for the soil and his especial soul forces connected therewith and also with his professional and traditional background, is able to follow his calling in a way that townsmen returning to the country, or partly self-maintenance-seeking suburban dwellers, can mostly experience only after very long practice. The first essential thing is to awaken in them a feeling for the forces of growth, for the eternally creative forces of Nature. The next step is to awaken in them a sense of responsibility toward these forces of growth, toward the health of the soil,

you will be living on the capital of the earth's natural fertility and the nation will be short-lived. The Minister of Agriculture is responsible if immediate profits during a relatively short period of time shall be allowed to deceive the people or whether measures can be taken that will ensure the life of the nation for centuries to come."

After the French nation had passed through unspeakable catastrophies and suffering we read the following proclamation by the French Government, dated Vichy, July 3rd, 1940: "MEASURES OF THE FRENCH MINISTRY OF RECONSTRUCTION: 1. France is above all a nation of peasants and craftsmen. These callings have been neglected too long and must be called into life again. 2. A sound balance between rural and industrial activities must and shall be re-established. 3. All workmen who are not specialists and who have been absorbed by the war industry from rural districts, must again return to the land. 4. A general policy of rural repopulation must be adopted. The earth of France can occupy and nourish far more people than has been the case during the last years."

of plants, of animals and of men, and also an inner sense of satisfaction in progressing toward this goal. This in turn becomes a compensation for the modesty of the livelihood earned. Those who cannot develop these ethical qualities will never become good farmers or colonizers, nor will they hardly ever become constructive members of the social organism. The main reason for the failure of so many social experiments, and more particularly of resettlement projects, has probably been the lack of these qualities in the majority of the participants.

On the plains of Northern Italy I once visited two peasants whose fields were in an exemplary condition and whose cattle, more than one hundred milking cows and many breeding bulls, had a high value. Both men were over sixty and could neither read nor write. Then I realized that farming requires something that cannot be learned at school, but is a profession which is also a world-conception, a service to Nature, a true "calling."

If today economic and ethical reasons call for an increase of the rural population (the small holder striving for self-maintenance belongs to it, as he lives on a biological unit of the cultivated earth) this goal can only be reached if moral factors are given due consideration. The spiritual life thus comes to the fore. The industrialized, technological, scientific life of the past fifty years could never carry through such projects, as it proved fundamentally hostile to rural life. Consequently the first inevitable requirement is a change in spiritual direction.

Prophets of agricultural developments such as O. E. Baker in the United States, and others on the continent of Europe, foretell that the sixties and seventies of this century will bring along the culminating years of rural development. The ascending line of industrial life will then have reached its climax. The populations will have gradually grown senile, as the balance between births and deaths will more and more have turned in favor of the latter, and the vital growth of new generations from rural districts will cease. If the present tendencies of human evolution keep on in the same tempo, such a state of things will become inevitable.

"It is no longer possible for our material well-being to keep on increasing at its former rate." "European-American civilization has suddenly become mature." "The future of the nation appears to lie largely in the hands of the rural people. Can they resist the disintegrating influence of certain habits of city culture?" Thus O. E. Baker: "Individual freedom and possibilities for development of personality are seriously impaired. Is this to be the ultimate result of the progress of science also in America? If so, it may mean the beginning of the decline of science." "Those who desire that their children also shall enjoy freedom and that science shall not decline but be ready to take the lead in the development of a more permanent civilization, should consider these things. The task is to associate science, including economics, with ethics, with a sense of responsibility to the future as well as to the present, to the family and to the nation as well as to the individual. Here lies the great opportunity for the Church." "My hope is that Christianity shall utilize science to develop a new civilization." A world historical significance should be attributed to these words of Baker.

The church did not fail to make a reply. Three months after the publication of Baker's book in 1939 a volume entitled "Rural Roads to Security" appeared, written by Msgr. Luigi G. Ligutti and Rev. John C. Rawe, S.J.. In this book we find trains of thought in connection with rural migration that are well worth reading especially in regard to their cultural foundations and economic consequences, all things well known to those familiar with bio-dynamic methods of farming. Four pages are dedicated to these bio-dynamic methods. Rural settlements with a cultural background are amply illustrated and results put in evidence. Msgr. Ligutti has demonstrated on his settlement at Granger, Iowa, what agricultural experts of the Department of Agriculture declared to be one of the few successful attempts of resettlement. The idea springs up of leaders teaching men the wisdom of rural existence, of personalities whose character, personal knowledge, experience and life-wisdom enable them to be active examples in centers of a new culture. The self-maintenance principle begins only then to transcend the sphere of self-interest and to acquire a social significance. In 1924 Rudolf Steiner spoke of the importance of fostering spiritual centers in the midst of rural surroundings and designated village communities as the foundation for a future social structure. "They would outlast the period of decay of Western culture like islands of the spirit."

Working its way out of mercantile and utilitarian principles America begins to set itself a cultural goal even as a basis for political and economic philosophy. But as long as the highest spiritual treasures of mankind are split up into creeds and as long as disharmony reigns between faith and science, we must move between extremes and be subject to uncertainties. It is the task of the farmer and those interested in farming to develop adequate measures to enable mankind to build up the outer surroundings necessary for a new kind of community. Only a community based on free expressions of thought from all those responsible for and connected with cultural progress will be capable of fostering a free spiritual life, which can become the source of ideas and impulses beneficent to the organization of the State and to the economical life and able to cope with the rapidly changing conditions that will reign during the next 20 years, at least. A science of the spirit may offer satisfaction to the longings of humanity. When such a science will have become common property, ethical forces bringing life, progress and peace will not only be awakened, but trained and matured. Would this not be a possible basis on which the nations could unite, turning away from wars and building up a new culture, jointly and peacefully? It depends on the will power and the insight of each one of us. For the thoughts of today are mighty powers and tomorrow they have become deeds.