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Peasants Demand Land

If the end result of our legislation is to prohibit—literally—the creation of better opportunities for peasants, what options are left to those who have nothing?

I

Peasants demand land. They argue that the State still holds land. Thus, INTA (National Institute for Agrarian Transformation) should distribute it by awarding titles of ownership; in other words, privatize it. However, this is not the long-term solution, because the State land will run out while the population continues to grow. At that point, to distribute more land is not an option. Paradoxically, the problem of land cannot be resolved with land.

What about prohibiting the cutting of firewood? How are peasants going to prepare their food if they don't have money to buy propane, or any way to buy electricity? INDE (National Electricity Institute) hasn't provided electricity, and legislation has forbidden the development of the electric industry. The problem of firewood cannot be resolved with firewood.¹

Peasants can't choose to work at a nearby factory, because there isn't one. This is because very few factories—even a simple cement block operation or saw mill—can operate if they don't have communication. GUATEL (Guatemalan Telephone Company) has not provided telephone service in the amount and quality required, nor will it be able to as long as it remains a state-owned company. Legislation prohibits installation of private telephone networks. An entrepreneur can install his own electric plant if INDE doesn't. He can drill his own well, if there is no public water service. He can even build his own road. What he can't do is provide a phone network for all of his potential clients and suppliers, so to install his own telephone line would be pointless.

Obviously, allowing people to invade private property is not an option either, since that would lead to general and violent chaos. Private property is an indispensable requirement and cornerstone of any civilized society.

The creation of opportunities is either prohibited or bureaucratic regulations make them prohibitive. Laws themselves violate the right to private property, to the natural right to do anything peacefully with one's own property, which is precisely what prevents development of a nation's citizens. Talk about human rights!

People go on pompously about human rights as others are being stripped of the very human right to freely dispose of their own actions as long as they respect the rights of others. For example, a

¹ Thou shalt not steal. Exodus 20:15; Deuteronomy 5:19; Matthew 19:18.

person is forbidden to invest his own well-earned assets in an electric plant, telephone network, or port facility, in order to peacefully and contractually sell the service to other citizens, who also have the very human right to pay that person with their well-earned assets in exchange. Is it so hard to understand that such prohibitions are a violation of human rights?

Peasants are left with the painful choice of immigrating illegally to a place where it is not against the law to set up telephone networks, produce electricity, and build ports and where, consequently, there are factories. Indeed, millions of peasants have emigrated, but it gets harder every day.

What is going to happen to our population if all options have been prohibited by law? Is that what you call rights?²

II

If the system is not liberated, the future looks dark. In countries that progress—meaning those that do not remain poor—every day the need for peasants is less, the need for manual labor is less, and less land is required to feed more people. In this era of automation, robots, biotechnology, communication, and electronics, manual labor is less necessary for production. Consequently, people dedicate themselves more to providing services. However, people who have nothing cannot buy the robotically-made goods. Nor can they sell services to others who, likewise, lack the means to purchase them.

When a community produces nothing more than rudimentary goods in an anarchic fashion, it faces an apparently insoluble problem: because its production is rudimentary, it has nothing to sell. Because it does not sell, it cannot buy. It cannot even buy propane to avoid deforestation. This is the desperate state of affairs to which the State's persistent mercantilism is leading us.

Incredibly, there is no lack of European socialists to add their destructive grain of salt. You hear their worried voices lamenting how developed countries exploit scientific advances and the super communication highway to widen the gap between rich and poor countries geometrically. Instead of lamenting the government-imposed obstacles in underdeveloped countries, they bemoan the success of developed nations!³

The world is not perfect, and there is no single solution. What is irrational is to prevent solutions. Meanwhile, poor and desperate peasants continue to wait.

III

Fortunately, solutions exist. However, relentless ideological resistance has thwarted them. The first thing that must be discarded once and for all is the ever present, typical solution: to prohibit things from being done. Prohibit **what** from being done? **Anything**. Prohibit extraction of petroleum, prohibit installation of phone lines, prohibit communication with the world via satellite, prohibit education, prohibit building port facilities, prohibit everything needed to

² “When presented with the problem of improving the condition of the lower classes, the principle preserving private property as an inviolable right is fundamental.” Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum*, 1891.

³ Editorial from Radio Netherlands, February 24, 1995.

progress. And then, ask the government either to do it or grant permission to do it little by little, with oversight, bribes, and suffocating bureaucratic regulation, using the excuse that the government has to direct and supervise it.

I don't understand how those who harshly criticize politicians can still believe that governments are able to manage a business, given that governments are made up of these same politicians. I find it highly inconsistent to oppose the idea that government (politicians) stop blocking solutions to poverty and allow citizens to freely engage in activities that are legal and peaceful. I fail to comprehend why we still prohibit private citizens from trying to solve problems that politicians can't. I don't understand how people propose to depoliticize a government—through autonomous entities?—and “remain democratic,” when democracy, by definition, is government “of the people,”—of all the people, not just those with vested interests—“by the people and for the people,” which is to say, it is managed politically. Do we want democracy without politics?⁴

I consider it cruel and deceptive to convince workers that demonopolization, privatization, and deregulation are bad for them and threaten their jobs, when, in reality, they are a necessary condition, albeit insufficient, to improve jobs in the entire country and to get out of poverty.

IV

Demonopolization is necessary to eliminate laws that prohibit the provision of services that the State has demonstrated time and again that it cannot provide everywhere, all the time.

Privatization is necessary for several reasons: (1) So that a state company, with the advantage of access to state power, does not inhibit competitors from entering the market. (2) Because when assets are in the government's portfolio, people don't have access to them for priorities such as roads and hospitals, which they might like to change for state companies. (3) Because assets will serve society better if managed under generally applied laws and market constraints, rather than under “probity laws” for the management of public assets and asphyxiating bureaucratic regulations. (4) Because simply owning commercial businesses always creates more problems for any government.

⁴ One day, St. Francis of Assisi was traveling through a city and a man possessed by the devil appeared before him. The man, forthwith, asked him: “What is the worst sin in the world?” St. Francis replied that the worst sin in the world is murder. The madman responded that there was a sin even worse than murder. St. Francis then said: “For the love of God, tell me what sin is worse than murder?” The Devil replied that possession of things that belong to our fellow man is a worse sin than murder, because more people go to Hell for that reason than any other.” Story told by St. Bernardino of Siena in Sermon XXVII of *De amore irratis, Opera omnia* (Venice, 1591).

St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that there were three reasons for which private property was suitable to human life. “First, because each person is more solicitous in the administration of that which, with exclusion, belongs to him, rather than that which is common to all or to many, since each person, abandoning work, leaves to another the care of what is recommendable to the common good, as occurs when there is abundance of servers. Second, because human affairs are administered in more orderly fashion when it behooves each person to care for his own interests, whereas confusion would reign if each person cared for everything indistinctly. Third, because the state of peace among men is better conserved if each man is content with that which is his own, reason for which we see that, among those who in common and *pro-indiviso* possess something, conflict shall arise more frequently.” St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II, 1274.

Deregulation is necessary because bureaucratic regulations are not meant to protect the rights of people, rather they exist so politicians can regulate activities, instead of allowing the market itself—the people themselves—to guide decisions. Society is left at the mercy of what bureaucrats in office know and understand—people who come to the job as apprentices and are ephemeral.

One could ask what guarantee do we have that private citizens (now fashionably known as “the private sector,” just as the military refers to its soldiers as “elements”) will provide these services. The answer is that they surely won’t be providing any service if it’s prohibited. And if first you have to explain to them what they have to do so they can be authorized to do it, we will be condemned to see happen only what government officials already have in mind to happen.

*The world is not perfect, and there is no single solution. What is irrational is to prevent solutions. Meanwhile, poor and desperate peasants continue to wait.*⁵

Translated from the original Spanish

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⁵ “Now there is no one who does not seek his own interest and no one who does not care more for providing for his house than for the Republic. Thus we see that private homesteads, those prosper and grow. Those of the city and council diminish; they are poorly supplied and are governed even worse, if not already sold. Thus states Aristotle, that it is inevitable for man to delight in receiving what occupies his own business. How much this is the case cannot be sufficiently explained; that to do a thing with joy, a man must consider it his own. On the contrary, it is with great tepidness that business in common is treated. Thus, lost as the first charity was, it was necessary for each one to possess some part in temporalities, in immoveable as well as moveable property; so that, no longer universal love, but self interest move him to conserve it. So that all the properties distributed and divided be increased, so that they could not but amount to much less, if amassed (supposing the sin) they remained.” Tomás de Mercado, *Manual of Deals and Contracts* (Seville, 1571).