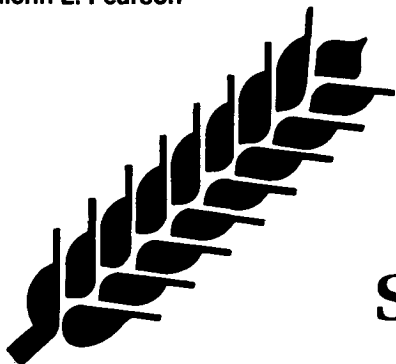


Glenn L. Pearson



# Socialism Eats the Seed Grain

ONE of the moral tragedies of socialism is that its economics is not built on savings, but on consumption. And this, also, is one of the main reasons it always has failed and always will fail. Economic failure is tragic because it means deprivation that can disrupt human plans and go even so far as to take human lives. In fact, starvation is a common aspect of life in countries where some type or another of socialism has been in operation long enough to have dissipated whatever wealth had accumulated prior to the socialist takeover. In those countries where poverty was already present when socialism was introduced, such as in some post-World War II African nations, star-

vation began immediately. Of course, starvation of the body is not as great a tragedy as starvation of the soul, if you believe in a soul. The materialistic socialists, who theoretically believe only in this life, should be especially offended by starvation—the ultimate indignity if there is no soul.

Some will point to Russia and China as examples of socialist countries which have accumulated capital and passed the starvation point. But those who do so are very uninformed about how much capital was already there. Perhaps they do not know about how much outside help Russia and China always have received by fair means and foul. Also, they must not know about how much free enterprise is actually allowed in Russia and China and how important it is to their survival. And, fi-

---

Mr. Pearson is recently retired after many years of writing and teaching at Brigham Young University and the Church Education System of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

nally, they are tragically unaware of how well Russia and China conceal the realities of life in some areas within their spheres of influence. Hints of horror continually drift out of the nations that have been caught in the webs of these giant spiders. With a few oft-repeated and carefully-selected releases, the liberal media, which preside over the minds of most of the West, tell us what they want us to believe as the following comments from one who was once one of them reveal:

It is not surprising, in view of this state of affairs, [The ruthless power Russia exerts on the foreign press.] that the world has been consistently misinformed about Russia, and that the Soviet Government has been able to put across a lot of bogus propaganda. It is fantastic, for instance, that there should still be any doubt about the question of forced labour and religious persecution, and Valuta [Money, especially gold and silver coins, that has other than fiat value.] extortion, and peasant shootings, and, in general, the character of corrupt dictatorship. But there is. (*Like It Was, The Diaries of Malcolm Muggeridge*, Selected and Edited by John Bright-Holmes; William Morrow and Company, Inc.: New York, 1982, p. 54)

... I managed to make my way by myself to the Ukraine and the Caucasus to report on the famine conditions there as a result of Stalin's enforced collectivization of agriculture. The articles I wrote describing the suffering and privations of the peasants, and the monstrous brutality of their treatment, were dis-

patched to the *Guardian* by diplomatic bag to avoid the censorship, and I knew that when they were published my position would be untenable. The articles duly appeared, heavily sub-edited, but even so caused some stir. In both the *Guardian* and the *New Statesman* letters were published calling me a liar. For confirmation of the truth of my report I had to wait for Khrushchev's speech at the 20th Party Conference in 1956, in which he gave his account of the 1933 famine and its consequences, showing mine to have been, if anything, an under-statement. . . . (*Ibid.*, pp. 73, 74.)

... *Winter In Moscow* had appeared and been reprinted, but, if anything, it hampered my efforts to get a job in Fleet Street. As I discovered, taking a strongly critical view of the Soviet regime and its bosses was a handicap rather than a help as far as the national press was concerned; the more so in my case because my abhorrence of a Marxist dictatorship as operated from the Kremlin did not make me any better disposed towards a capitalist economy as operated from the City of London or Wall Street. Although I did not recognize it then, the liberal consensus which was to provide the orthodox or Party-Line of the so-called free world, was already in process of formation, and beginning to be enforced. (*Ibid.*, p. 77.)

But physical suffering is never as tragic or long-lasting as spiritual suffering. Great spiritual damage is done to people who are led to believe that economic problems can be solved without savings—the accumulation of capital. The virtue of frugality and the evils of profligacy are the subject

of many pages in the great religious books of all world religions. The reasons are easily seen by thoughtful people of all faiths, and even by those who claim no faith. In the early days of the American frontier there was a saying worth pondering long: "Don't eat the seed grain." Socialism regularly eats the seed grain.

### **The Steps to Progress**

The free market proceeds in a very orderly, step-by-step, manner. Step one is vision. The poor, but free, man sees himself improved by his own labor. His is not the vision of a robber whose soul covets the rewards of another man's toil. And it is not the vision of a fool who can be enticed into a get-rich-quick scheme: he doesn't plan to give his meager surplus, when he has saved it, to someone who presents an image of cleverness and strength superior to his own. He will rely on his own arm, and the help that lies at the end of it. So his vision is clear and specific. He knows always just what he needs in order to do more efficiently just what he does well already.

Step two is to go through the sacrifice and self-denial of living on less than he earns for however long he must to save enough to purchase some tool or capital good that he needs to increase his productivity. He has vision for muscle and hope for fat to keep him going. He even may have to beg to get to the point

where he can save. The socialist world has forgotten that it is better to beg than to steal, that it is better to give what is your own than what you took from another, and that it is better to look for those in need than to wait until they unite and break down your door. Socialists visualize a utopia where hungry mouths are filled with legal plunder. And they forget the blood and tears that follow the plunderers, the tax men.

Step three is the purchase of the capital item. It may be nothing more than a cultivator to take the place of a hoe to use in a garden that will now produce more—maybe enough for a wayside fruit and vegetable stand. Or it may be enough to purchase a fast-food franchise so the family can have a business instead of a lifetime of the bondage of wage-earning and unemployment lines. To a nineteenth-century Jewish or Italian immigrant it may have been a push-cart for a vending business which, from that humble beginning, could have grown, in one lifetime, to a million dollar enterprise if the same virtues that started the business were perpetuated when it succeeded.

### **Self-Control**

The common element of all virtues is self-denial. If you would not murder, deny yourself the luxury of anger. If you would practice moral rectitude, deny your mind evil thoughts and your eyes enticing im-

ages. If you wish to possess the soul of one who can be trusted with other men's money and goods, kill your covetousness by being quick to give the poor what they need when they ask if you are able. Don't send them away with a promise of future generosity if you have the means to do it right now. This will make it possible to be wealthy and yet not feel guilty in your wealth like the rich prophets of socialism do. Socialism takes this pleasure and virtue of giving away from you. Remember, a bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water. Charity must be voluntary to be virtuous. Those who practice voluntary charity are improved by it. The reason it works is that self-denial becomes a habit, a way of life; and it is the fuel which runs all those who achieve great and good goals—those whose labor is the foundation of all the good production of this world.

Step four, of course, is that careful and industrious use of the capital item purchased from savings. And step five is the same process all over again—vision and self-denial practiced on a high enough level to insure replacement of the capital item when it is worn out. And more: there must be a greater savings than before because there is greater income. And one who can start this kind of program for the purpose of greater consumption—improvement of the living standard—must not make

consumption an end in itself or he will lose the virtue that saved him from starvation in the first place.

### **The Socialist Program**

The first step in the socialist program of improvement also begins with vision. But it is not the vision of an individual trying to improve his lot with his own labor and his own capital, saved, begged or borrowed. It is the vision of conspirators who have looked at the misery of mankind and have appointed themselves as the saviors of the unfortunate. Calling them conspirators is neither overly dramatic nor an exaggeration. They fit any reasonable standard for the use of the word. It is an interesting fact that it is almost impossible to get good people to conspire to do anything. They mostly want to be about their own business and rarely presume to know enough to plan the lives of others.

Yes, "big business" has been caught in conspiracies quite regularly during the past several decades. But, other than those cases that are misrepresentations and of the sort that fit the damned-if-you-do and damned-if-you-don't dilemmas served up by government agencies, it can be shown that government planners either handed them the opportunity or forced them into it. Almost nothing that is going on in American business today is pure free enterprise. Indeed, no business activity is

untouched by the laws, bureaus and regulations that burden and warp the free market. However, set American business aside and think of the typical model of socialism. In that case, you surely have a set of planners who have come into power by a conspiracy. It is their vision that is step one in the socialist plan of improvement.

Step two is the production planning session where they decide how many cars, widgets, tooth brushes, and the like they shall manufacture. They never get it quite right even though they peek at the free market, as Ludwig von Mises was the first to point out.

Step three is the allocation of resources. Of course, step two and step three have to be coordinated or done together. The one asks, "What shall we make?" The other asks, "How much capital will we be able to get our hands on to do it?"

Step four is the confiscation of or gathering of capital. Theoretically a socialist state already has all the capital that exists in the country. But, since there is never enough capital to wage the perennial wars of socialism and feed, clothe and shelter the masses, the socialists must be ever alert for new sources of revenue. There are the countries they have "liberated" to be stripped and an eye must be kept on the sneaky peasants who find ways to save from their meager allotments. So socialist countries have taxes, too.

And they have rules against hoarding things that could add to capital for socialist production. After all, it takes capital to produce whether the economic system is socialist or private. In the socialist system the capital is "appropriated" by some compulsory (involuntary) means. In the private enterprise system, it is accumulated by savings based on voluntary self-denial.

The socialist step five is the production step. It is common knowledge that production rarely meets any of the goals set by the planners. This has led to many purges. The socialist mind tends to believe that the solution to greater production lies in the quality of the supervisors rather than in the quality of the system. This results in grave injustices in who knows how many cases. And it creates a system of cruelty and jeopardy. Also, it trains the masses to lay blame on the government for all problems instead of developing self-reliance.

### **Saving Discouraged**

That's how socialism eats the seed grain: it uses up and eliminates all desire to save. It punishes and discourages all savers. There is no motivation to do anything but consume—get one's share and eat it up. It is like opening day of fishing season: many fishermen want to follow the stocking trucks and get "their" limit. They expect the state to keep

the waters stocked with catchables. If the fishing is bad, they grumble and feel that the state has failed them. The care of the back and the belly becomes the immediate and pressing need, the whole object of occupation and preoccupation except for the circus. There must be the circus in addition to the bread. It comes in different packages from country to country and time to time.

People are the most important asset of a nation when they are free to be productive and responsible for their own capital. But, when weak and discouraged, they are the greatest liability. Then a man may just as well be an alimentary canal with a funnel for a mouth, wrapped in an overcoat and housed in a mobile latrine. All the things of the soul cease to have meaning. ☉

### Saving, Foreign Aid, and Growth

THE MAIN resources and the main effort for growth must come from the growing nations themselves. American aid can usefully complement, but can never replace, their own means and endeavors. Indeed, gifts and loans are not the major contribution we can make to economic growth abroad. More important is that we maintain a fully and efficiently employed and expanding economy of our own and that we maintain free access to this economy by the rest of the world. In neither good sense nor in good conscience can we expend our resources on foreign aid while at the same time leaving clogged the channels of foreign trade and investment.

Finally, we must appreciate that the world is a complicated place. In important respects, it is far more complicated and discouraging for today's economically underdeveloped countries than it was for the underdeveloped nations, including the U.S., of 150 or 200 years ago.

In America, the cultural background; the supply of acquired skills of workers and of experienced investors and managers; the legal, religious, and economic institutions; the climate; the endowment of natural resources; the ratio of population to other resources—all were favorable to growth and, by and large, remain favorable to continued growth. Not all areas of the world are so blessed. And even if they were, the living standard of this part of the world is now far higher than that of most regions—and it is very likely that the size of the gap will grow much larger during the next several decades.

WILLIAM R. ALLEN

IDEAS ON



LIBERTY

# BLAMING TECHNOLOGY

WHEN Samuel C. Florman, the vice president of a construction company, wrote a provocative book called *The Existential Pleasures of Engineering*, he found himself invited to take part in dozens of debates with proponents of the anti-technological movement. Visiting the college campuses, he discovered that professors could be deceptively serene. Jovial at dinner, they nonetheless carried theories "under their tweeds like stilettos." Their students, "after disarming a visitor with wide-eyed veneration," delighted in tossing up "challenging statements like cherry bombs." A scientist by training, Mr. Florman decided that academia was not a likely place to hunt for the truth.

It somehow got under Mr. Florman's skin when he heard a young man, with professorial encouragement, disparage farm tractors in comparison with oxen. But Florman's mood really soured when a young woman solemnly arose to an-

nounce that the building they were meeting in should never have been built since it was constructed on terrain sacred years ago to an Indian tribe.

Florman's adventures in academia provoked him into writing a second book, *Blaming Technology: The Irrational Search for Scapegoats* (St. Martin's Press, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010, 206 pp., \$12.95). It is a markedly gentle book considering some of the violent speeches that moved Florman to undertake a work that had to be done.

Florman concedes that we live in a world filled with ambiguities and paradoxes. The good points of oxen can be admitted: they don't consume gasoline, and they provide manure to enrich the soil. Their only drawback is that they are no longer capable of ploughing Kansas in a way to feed the world. As for the Indians who once hunted in Michigan woods, Florman does not quarrel with the idea that they were wronged. But