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# THE CART AND THE HORSE

*Erosion, And Food For The Starving*

A CORRESPONDENT who read J. O. H. Tripp's article in a recent issue of "The Listener," suggests that students of erosion might be interested in these comments by a contributor, JORIAN JENKS, to the "New English Weekly"

THE recent United Nations Conference on Food and Agriculture deserved a better Press than it got. Hot Springs was no doubt expected to yield hot news, failing which, the desired superheated atmosphere had to be created synthetically. In fact, the report of the conference—curiously and (one hopes) not too literally entitled, the "Final Act"—is an admirably comprehensive and lucid document, provided always that one is prepared to accept as valid and realistic the current department-store approach to the basic problem of food.

This is the crucial question. It is answered indirectly by a perusal of the list of international representatives assembled at Hot Springs. This galaxy of administrative, economic, financial

and commercial talent, it seems, did not include a single working farmer, peasant, field labourer, or fisherman. Is it unreasonable to suggest that a conference comprising even a leaven of these humble experts would have brought to the notice of the world and its Press a fundamental truth which appears to have escaped the notice of the extremely intelligent and well-meaning gentlemen who produced the Final Act?

### Upwards, Not Downwards

This truth is that all enduring civilisation is built upwards from the soil, and not downwards from human desires. No economic machinery, no "principles of mutual responsibility and co-ordinated action," however excellent in themselves, can by-pass this truth, the long-standing neglect of which is a prime cause of the present world crisis. For the aggression which the Conference rightly condemns began long ago with the destructive impact of predatory human agencies upon the creative civilisation of Nature. War is simply its climateric phase.

Let us be perfectly just. The Final Act does include, though well down on its list of findings and recommendations, a pregnant reference to what is undoubtedly the most menacing of all dynamic force at large in the world to-day.

"Soil erosion has, in the past, destroyed or severely limited the utility of vast areas of land, and will in the future, unless checked, constitute the greatest physical danger to the world's food production."

It goes on to recommend comprehensive physical measures to cope with soil erosion, including a timely advocacy of "balanced mixed rotational farming" rather than monoculture. It does not, however, refer to the man-made economic causes of erosion. On the contrary, it re-states with almost painful clarity the view that industrial expansion and the revival of international trade must precede the long-term rehabilitation of agriculture. This is not merely putting the cart before the horse; it is giving the cart a good hearty shove in the wrong direction. For one of the very few forms of protection which the soil has had in the past consisted of those very "barriers to international trade" that the Conference is so anxious to see removed.

An attempt to arrange the recommendations of the Conference in order of priority yields the following programme:

- (1) *Victory. It is implied that its attainment will involve devastation on a grand scale, and will find the occupied countries in a state of destitution.*
- (2) *Emergency measures designed to stimulate production by every means possible, even if they "delay a return to production"*

(continued on next page)

NEW ZEALAND LISTENER, DECEMBER 10

Someday it'll be

**News!**



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