

WAS IT UNEMPLOYMENT OR DISEMPLOYMENT?

4800

CRUSOE'S ISLE EXPERIENCES DEPRESSION

THE PROBLEM

"Friday," said Robinson Crusoe, "I'm sorry. I fear I must lay you off."

"What do you mean, Master?"

"Why, you know there's a big surplus of last year's crop. I don't need you to plant another this year. I've got enough goat-skin clothes to last me a lifetime. My house needs no repairs. I can gather turtle eggs myself. There's an overproduction. When I need you I'll send for you. You needn't wait around here."

"That's all right, Master. I'll plant my own crop, build my own hut and gather all the eggs and nuts I want myself. I'll get along fine."

"Where will you do all this, Friday?"

"Here on this island."

"This island belongs to me, you know. I can't allow you to do that when you can't pay me anything I need. I might as well not own it."

"Then I'll build a canoe and fish in the ocean. You don't own that."

"That's all right, provided you don't use any of my trees for your canoe, or build it on my land or use my beach for a landing place and do your fishing far enough away so as not to interfere with my riparian rights."

"I never thought of that, Master. I can do without a boat, though. I'll swim over to that rock and fish there and gather sea gull eggs."

"No you won't, Friday. That rock is mine. I own riparian rights."

"What shall I do, Master?"

"That's your problem, Friday. You're a free man and you know about the rugged individualism maintained here."

"I guess I'll starve, Master. May I stay here until I do or shall I swim beyond your riparian rights and drown or starve there?"

"I've thought of something Friday. I don't like to carry my garbage down to the shore each day. You may stay and do that. Then whatever is left of it after my dog and cat have been fed you may eat. You're in luck."

"Thank you, Master. That is true charity."

"One thing more, Friday. This island is over-populated. Fifty per cent. of the people are unemployed. We are undergoing a severe depression and there is no way that I can see to end it. No one but a charlatan would say that he could. So keep a lookout and let no one land here to settle and if any ship comes don't let them land any goods of any kind. You must be protected against foreign labor. Conditions are fundamentally sound, though, and prosperity is just around the corner."—Samuel Danziger, American Economic League.

HOW FRIDAY SOLVED IT

"Good morning, Master," said Friday, "it was truly charitable of you to let me have a place to lie down last night. I got no sleep, but I thought hard about my problem."

"And what did you accomplish?" responded Robinson Crusoe.

"Master," said Friday, "is it true that the principles of the Declaration of Independence have been accepted by us on this island and, therefore, that each one of us has a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?"

"Most assuredly it is true," replied Crusoe.

"And," continued Friday, "is it true that you and I as citizens of this island have equal rights and equal opportunities, and that our votes count equally?"

"Why, of course, my dear Friday, all of that is essential to liberty, and we should be thankful that we live where true liberty exists and no one is a slave."

"I appreciate that, Master, but at the same time your title to the island gives you great power over me. I cannot work for myself anywhere on the island without your consent, and that consent you won't give because I can't pay you anything. There-

fore, I am obliged to ask work from you, but all you offer me as a job is the carrying of your garb—"

"Friday," interrupted Crusoe severely, "it appears to me that your ideas are radical if not seditious. Are you criticising the institutions of your country? Do you intend to try and change them by the use of force and violence?"

"Oh, no, Master, certainly not! I believe in law and order and would make no change except through the ballot. But you know, Master, in your title to the island you hold a valuable privilege for which you ought to pay."

"Privilege! Nonsense!" burst in Crusoe. "Don't you know that a landlord has worries and responsibilities? Don't you realize that it is I who furnish the land for you to work on or, in other words, it is I who give you a job?"

"Yes, I understand, Master, but just now you won't give me a decent job with a living wage and you won't let me work for myself. Now, I have a plan which will remedy this condition."

"I see," shouted Crusoe, "you intend to divide up the land, to deprive me of my property. Such a proposal is Socialism. No! it is worse. It's Communism."

"Oh, no, Master," returned Friday, with a slight smile. "I am merely proposing for our vote a practical measure. It is that land owners shall be required to pay to the community a tax equal to the rental value of their land, in return for the exclusive use guaranteed to them by the community. In our case, as you are the sole land owner, you will pay the rental value of the whole island to the community, which means to you and me jointly. We can use this fund for community purposes, that is for what we jointly desire to accomplish. And you see, Crusoe, that you will have to cultivate more of the land than you have been doing in order to earn the tax you will have to pay; and in order to extend the cultivation adequately you will have urgent need of my services. Then you won't be able to drive such a hard bargain as you did last night."

"How dare you even suggest such a proposal? And how dare you call me 'Crusoe'? Your plan amounts to confiscation of the value of my property. But fortunately confiscation of property without due process of law is prohibited by our Constitution."

"'Confiscation' is an ugly word," said Friday, quietly, "but with the present arrangement it is you, Crusoe, who can and do confiscate what I produce. And as to 'process of law' there will be no lack of it under my plan. You know that you and I together forming the whole community of this island, have the lawful right to levy taxes, and if you object to paying rent directly as rent then it can be taken instead as a tax on the value of your land properly assessed."

"And," continued Friday, "this island is not overpopulated. It only seems so because you won't let me use it. There is plenty of room for many more persons who can all have land to use, or good jobs, once your power to withhold land from use is ended."

"Neither will there be over-production when each gets what he produces, or its equivalent in wages, instead of piling up a surplus for you to waste or destroy. And when all are employed, who will fear the competition of foreign goods? They will only come here in exchange for what we produce, and if the foreigner insists on taking very little in exchange, or, in other words, 'dumps' his goods or gives them to us, we shall be only too glad and can take life easy."

"Well, I have half the votes and I won't support your measure," angrily exclaimed Crusoe as he rushed away.

"But I have half the votes and will insist on Good-bye, Robbie."

And then Friday with a broad grin proceeded own crop and build his own house. And that depression and unemployment.—John S. Codmar