of peace, and of ever-increasing liberty. The pessimist proclaims an equally inescapable future of destitution, of destruction, and of ever-shrinking liberty. The appropriate response to this deterministic duet is surely, "A plague on both your houses!"

There is no such thing as "the" future. What exists is a range of *possible* futures. A world more prosperous, more peaceful, and more committed to liberty than is the world of today is a possible future. So is a world of destitution, destruction, and tyranny. Which possibility becomes a reality largely depends upon the choices men and women make today, choices which, in turn, largely depend upon the ideas and the ideals men and women embrace. It is as simple, but as demanding, as that.

Hence a third alternative: cheerful, positive realism! A more prosperous, more peaceful world more committed to liberty than is the world of yesteryear or of today is a real and exciting possibility. More: there are grounds for affirming that such a world, while certainly not inevitable, is more likely than the barren wasteland frequently depicted by the prophets of pessimism!

Consider the following "signs of hope":

• During the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century, socialism was a theory. Today the bare bones of theory have been fleshed out in practice. The outcome of every socialist experiment has been the same: sheer and utter disaster! In the 1920s Ludwig von Mises, for many years associated with FEE, argued that economic calculation in a socialist economy is literally impossible, but men and women captivated by the dream of socialism clung to the belief that socialist thinkers such as Oskar Lange and Abba Lerner had adequately replied to this argument. Six decades of disastrous socialist experience have forced socialists to re-examine the debate. It is, as Marxists would say, "no accident" that socialist states have been forced in the direction of freer markets! It is no accident that Chinese contributors to a recent volume published by the New World Press, Beijing—*China's Search for Economic Growth*—castigate egalitarianism as an "evil" doctrine which "protects the backward . . . [and] frustrates the enthusiastic." It is no accident that Western politicians—who notoriously are more like thermometers than thermostats, registering rather than controlling the intellectual temperature—are talking of "deregulation" and "privatization." *The great fact of our age is the demonstrated failure in practice of socialism.*

• The computer confronts socialist states with an insoluble dilemma. The effective use of computer technology makes possible—in fact demands—an incidence of lateral, person-to-person communication striking terror in the hearts of socialists committed to the "controlled-from-above" information flow of the totalitarian state. Allow this technology to flourish, and the tyrant's rule is threatened. Forbid this technology, and socialist states lag even further behind free nations. What to do?

• While entrenched special interest groups—business, union, and welfarist—still lobby government for favors, desiring to improve their situation whatever the cost to other people might be, more and more people are resenting such alliances with government and are doubting the statist dogma that interventionist governments can advance the well-being of all. A growing number of people have learned the hard way that a government able to enrich them by plundering others can also enrich others by plundering them!

• Some decades ago high marginal taxation rates were perceived as burdens borne, for the most part, by an unusually wealthy "them." Today it is widely realized that the costs of free-spending governments are and can only be carried by the "average" citizen *and* that a nation eroding its capital base is jeopardizing the well-being of all. The high-taxers and big-spenders in government are on the defensive!

• The patient work of serious scientists and sound economists has undermined the prophets of doom and gloom who predicted a grim future of depleted resources and who advocated stringent "limits to growth." The pseudo-science and fallacious economics of such doomsayers have been exposed for what they are in such volumes as Julian Simon and Herman Kahn's *The Resourceful Earth*.

Simply, signs of hope abound for those with eyes to see them!

"Truth," someone once asserted, "is an anvil that has worn out many a hammer." The case for cheerful, positive realism rests upon that claim. We delude ourselves if we say that the truth *must* triumph over error. We also, however, delude ourselves if we say that truth *cannot* so triumph, or if we forget that truth has a habit of so triumphing. The freedom philosophy has withstood a mighty long testing. The moral values it enshrines and the economic truths it proclaims have emerged from millennia of human experiment and experience, and have survived the onslaughts of many foes. Our children and children's children *could* know and enjoy a world more prosperous, more peaceful, and more committed to liberty than the worlds of yesteryear or of today. Whether they *do* know such a world depends upon the choices we today and they tomorrow make. Most important of these choices is a wholehearted "Yes!" to cheerful, positive realism, and a determined "No!" to the complacency spawned by facile optimism and the despair bred of pessimism.

—John K. Williams
Visiting Scholar

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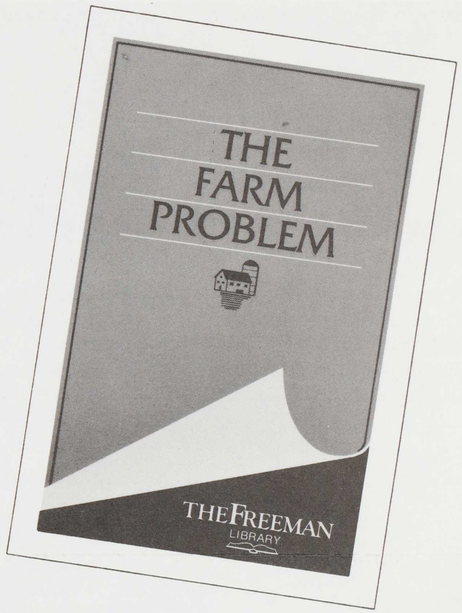

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