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THE CONFLICT

Look over the world to-day, in countries the most widely differing—under conditions the most diverse as to government, as to industries, as to tariffs, as to currency—you will find distress among the working-classes; but everywhere that you thus find distress and destitution in the midst of wealth you will find that the land is monopolized; that instead of being treated as the common property of the whole people, it is treated as the private property of individuals; that, for its use by labour, large revenues are extorted from the earnings of labour. Look over the world to-day, comparing different countries with each other, and you will see that it is not the abundance of capital or the productiveness of labour that makes wages high or low, but the extent to which the monopolizers of land can, in rent, levy tribute upon the earnings of labour.—HENRY GEORGE.

The picture which Henry George drew of the world around him half a century ago is still in its broad outlines true of the world to-day. The same causes produce, and must produce, the same results. Growth of population, new inventions, greater knowledge and ability to control the forces of nature, have but accentuated the contrast between riches and poverty. The small minority of the extremely wealthy is richer than ever. Absolute starvation, perhaps, is rarer, but only because State-organized charity takes a little from the rich—an insurance against revolution, a salve to uneasy conscience, or a veil thrown over a horrid picture.

While with one hand the State alleviates a little the wretchedness born of an unjust system, with the other it cherishes and endows still further those who profit by it. The quasi-revolutionary government of Germany could attain to power only by pledging itself to the vested interests, and so betrayed those who read in its programme a promise of equality and liberation from economic bondage. In Austria not merely the reactionary forces at home, but even the members of the League of Nations have conspired to prevent freedom of trade with Germany and to bind more tightly on the people an unjust fiscal system by making customs duties and tobacco taxes the security for foreign loans.

All over the world governments impede exchange and raise prices by tariffs, quotas and exchange restrictions. All are seized with the same mania for restricting the production of wealth, and especially the production of the elements of life, making them dearer and scarcer for populations impoverished by prolonged unemployment.

In the United States cotton is ploughed under the ground, and millions of young pigs are killed to prevent them turning into pork. Farmers are paid a bonus on land withdrawn from wheat production, but nature by blighting the crop has out-done the efforts of the President. The East European countries, Russia and India, have little wheat to export. Argentina and Canada alone have a large surplus for export. The Canadian government, however, has long entered the ranks of the wheat speculators. A stock of 200,000,000 bushels of Canadian wheat has been accumulated

waiting for higher prices, and so the Canadian premier hastens to Paris to negotiate with the Argentine importers to negotiate a pool in wheat to keep it off the market and raise prices.

The measures taken by our own government to curtail the supply and raise the prices of all the principal foodstuffs have time after time been exposed in these columns.

What is the purpose that is served by all these restrictions upon trade and upon production? Are all the statesmen of the world blind to the consequences of this policy of beggar my neighbour? Can they fail to see that it creates national antagonisms, fosters the feeling that foreigners are enemies seeking to undermine the means of livelihood, and sows the seeds of future wars?

Such errors could not persist were it not for the fact that within the confines of each nation strong causes of discord and antagonism exist. Inordinate wealth struggles to secure its special privileges and to retain that economic power which makes the masses poor.

The rapid advance in material progress which characterized the years preceding the crisis brought ever-increasing revenues to those who held the natural resources. The selling value of land rose higher and higher, based upon revenues expected in the future, and out of all proportion to present earning capacity. Governments then set to work, not to destroy speculative values, but to justify them. The burden of indirect taxation was increased, while direct taxation was reduced. The production of wealth was restricted in order to force up the value of commodities, and ultimately to maintain the value of land.

The results of these policies in the United States are shown in Mr Marsh's article in another column. The results in this country have been similar. Unemployment is still acute, wages are still low, the cost of living is rising and land values are being maintained and even increased.

Within the boundaries of each nation an economic war is being waged between those who hold the means of life within their power and those who have been disinherited of their natural birth-right. The vested interests appear for the moment to be triumphant, but will it be for long? Every government, democratic or despotic, depends eventually upon the acquiescence of the masses. So long as these succumb to the propaganda of their oppressors, so long will they be oppressed, but they are becoming disillusioned. The feeling grows that there is a fundamental injustice in the distribution of wealth, that it is unnatural that those who toil should have so little and those who idle so much. Will blind Samson pull down all in common ruin, or will reason destroy only those unjust property rights which deprive labour of its earnings, and preserve what is worth preserving of our common civilization? These are the alternatives that lie before us.

F. C. R. D.

At the request of a number of readers the article "Russian Lessons" appearing in August *Land & Liberty* has been reprinted in small pamphlet form and copies are available for anyone making application. For those who wish to have a quantity, the price is at the rate of 6d. per dozen post free.

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On the 21st September in Huddersfield the marriage took place of Mr Ashley Mitchell and Miss Hannah Margaret Lamb. We offer our warm congratulations and in this we know we speak for all his many colleagues and co-workers in the Henry George cause at home and abroad, among whom his name is a household word. Their and our good-will goes in the fullest measure to Mr and Mrs Mitchell and sincerest wishes for their future happiness.