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DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS CANNOT ENDURE WHEN BUILT UPON ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

By the Editors:

DEMOCRATIC institutions are important, but they cannot endure built upon economic inequality. Other civilizations have perished through causes of decay identically the same. It is the nature of justice that wherever her claims are denied the punishment is death and this is the law for nations even more than for individuals. For seventy years the United States grew in power and influence. To all intents and to all appearances we were a great and growing nation; in reality we were slowly yielding to a power that was sapping our vitals. Half of the nation was free; in the southern half of the country, its least important half in culture and enlightenment, slavery existed; justice was denied, and in consequence the institution of slavery was entrenched at Washington, and every step that might have been taken for human freedom was halted by that incubus. We who might have been a beacon light to the world, saw our glorious pretentions denied in the shadow of that great Wrong. Then because they whom the gods would destroy they first make mad, the arrogant slave power of the South sought the dread arbitrament of arms for the perpetuation of their institution, and the Civil War was upon us. We lived through it and escaped the peril that faced us, though at a fearful cost. But as surely as justice determines the fate of nations, so would Slavery have destroyed us if not itself destroyed.

TODAY another great injustice overspreads the world. Slavery in comparison was a pygmy wrong. It is slowly sapping the strength of the nations, destroying all true perspective, atrophying the moral sense. It is determining the trend of Christianity itself, whose ethical code it is slowly transforming. Men otherwise blameless in their private life count it no shame to live without work on the values publicly created, and defend the institution of private property in land

with twisted logic. That the masses of men are born into a world in which they have no right to a foothold, seems no contradiction of the Scriptural injunctions, "The earth is the Lord's," "The earth hath He given to the children of men," "The land shall not be sold forever." Though bearing the divine sanction, these have become mere "glittering generalities."

IT is therefore something more than the mere diversion of wealth to those to whom it does not properly belong, since they have done nothing to earn it, that Henry George set out to destroy. Just as the Hebrew prophets sought not merely the physical liberation of their people, but their spiritual liberation as well, and indeed as a far higher consideration, so must we recognize that our aim is not merely the material betterment that will come as a release from the degrading slavery to a false ideal. "The Kingdom of God is within us." The New Jerusalem seen in the vision of Saint John was not a material place of jasper and gold, but a spiritual city. Such a city cannot, however, be based upon economic injustice; the old prophecy is the true one that links the freedom of the spirit with the absence of earthly tyranny and injustice. And something in the vision of William Blake, that strangely gifted genius whose fragments are glorious contributions to English poetry, may fittingly inspire us:

" I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall the sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land."

AN instructive study may be drawn from the life and thought of Plato that throws some light upon modern theories of Socialism and their inevitable influence upon the individual. Plato was the greatest thinker of antiquity if we except his master Socrates, of whom the most we know is through his illustrious pupil. In his "Republic" Plato sought to establish the perfect state. This state should be benevolently paternal, and in no work written by ancient or modern is there a greater or more thorough treatment of an ideal. Hardly a detail is omitted in the elaborate attempt to construct what shall be an ideally

perfect society, and the picture is reinforced by those literary and philosophic graces that make Plato an out- standing figure in the world of thought and imagination.

EVERYWHERE the figure of Socrates, who, despite the fact that he did not possess to the same degree the literary graces of Plato, was a clearer and better trained mind, dominates the philosophy. Plato venerated Socrates his was the inspiration of this laboriously constructed social state, and though some of the political devices seem, in the light of modern thought, rather childish, the aim is human happiness and justice between men.

NOW we are to observe a curious phenomenon, natural enough, however, under the circumstances. There is an analogy here between the attempt of the Russian Soviets to establish a republic based upon newer concepts in which old customs were to be consigned to the limbo of forgotten things. Their mistake was the same as Plato's no attempt was made to discover natural laws and forces. Men were mechanically constructed instruments or tools to be fitted together, and their activities to be regulated by some directing intelligence. So the promise in so far as it promised anything to establish a Russian communistic state was not fulfilled, and the original plan, so far as it was a plan, underwent modifications from time to time, and is still undergoing experimentation.

NOW what happened to Plato? The greatest mind that has ever been directed to the problem of the imaginary state, building laboriously and with an extraordinary intelligence the pillars of his Utopia, came to the inevitable sequel. Forty years after the "Republic" was written came the "Laws." Socrates has disappeared with all his benign influence. The attempt to regulate the affairs of mankind in accordance with the dictates of a benevolent paternalism has given way to a body of laws the most tyrannous ever conceived by man. Well has an English writer said: "The disciple who wrote the Phaedo has become the inquisitor who would have joined in the indictment of Socrates. There is nothing in the history of philosophy or letters to compare with this appalling collapse."

[unreadable] the sequel was, as we have said, a perfectly-natural one. It is the inevitable conclusion of every attempt to remould society on a mechanistic basis. Either disillusionment results, or the paternalism gravitates naturally into despotism to maintain the administration of its benevolent features. The "Laws" of Plato was not so much a collapse from the earlier teachings of the "Republic" as the logical conclusion of those teachings. It may have sprung, as some writers have contended, from Plato's disappointment with the stupidity of mankind, a natural revolt from the enthusiasm of his youth, but if so it was not so much mankind that was at fault as Plato himself. He had not been able to discern those natural forces at all times adequate to the maintainance of a just and stable society. His failure was the failure of all socialistic experiments, whether undertaken collectively, or elaborated in the constitution of an imaginary State. But because of Plato's great wisdom and the philosophic eminence that is justly his, there is an added pathos in what the writer just quoted calls his "appalling collapse." There is also a valuable lesson for all those who would follow in his footsteps.

"THE reasons for the existence of the State are the economic needs of man. Man is an individual before he is a member of a community. He makes his living by applying his labor to land; he exchanges the products of his labor with those otherwise employed. As values attaching to certain portions of land arise, the needs of government cooperative activities simultaneously come into being. The community or State is now born. Experience determines the things that may be cooperatively undertaken and which we call public. These should be limited strictly by the amount of ground rent available for public use. But when this rent goes into private hands there is no index to determine the extent or number of these so-called public or cooperative functions.

PLATO erred, as all theoretic builders of the artificial State err, Sir Thomas Moore, Marx, Lennin, Morris, and the host of their socialistic imitators. The Cooperative Commonwealth is inherent in the nature of society, and not more government but less government

is what is desired. New York City, where nearly seven millions of people contrive to feed and clothe themselves at least with a moderate degree of efficiency, and without any directing supervision, is the natural cooperative commonwealth. How much better they could do this if there were no artificial hindrances will be clear to those who begin their speculations from the starting point of the individual who makes the State rather than from the State that exists for the individual, and whose functions must be constantly minimized in the interests of the free 'play of individual needs and desires.

THAT is what Jefferson meant when he said that that government is best which governs least. The Power which made the earth and peopled it, endowed the individual with economic needs and desires; society is motivated along the lines of these needs and desires, and assumes naturally the form best suited to the activities of the individual. If it does not work as it should it is because of the artificial hindrances to those natural laws that were here whenever two men came together, and before great cities were built, and before the craze for more and more government began to obsess men.

[unreadable] those who will think there is something infinitely childish in the building of systems of society for men to live by. Plato's "Republic" and we speak with profound veneration for the greatest mind of antiquity was, despite its literary charm, an amateur performance. Much as little children pile up their building blocks according to maps, Plato built his structure of the State, which despite occasional flashes of inspiration, remained a city untouched by any gleam of human attractiveness and patterned in monotonous outline [unreadable] all who would build the imaginary State, first let them bear in mind the one natural law that the rent of land belongs to the people and that it is the first duty government to collect it. They will then see that the State is already built for them. The administration of that fund and the preservation of order about exhaust the functions of the State ; the natural forces at play between individuals determine the economic activities of society and secure, if allowed freely to operate, the maximum of human satisfactions. There is no more need of an artificially organized and personally directed economic State than

there is for a system of codes and laws to regulate seed time and harvest, with which the operation of economic forces in society may with some appropriateness be likened.