

# Land and Freedom

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## Comment and Reflection

**A**FTER twenty-one years of "peace," the dogs of war have again been unleashed in Europe. Never before has the art of destruction been conceived and carried out on the scale we are now witnessing. What explanation can be offered for this new "Scourge of God"? The answer is in *Progress and Poverty*: "Unless its foundations be laid in justice, the social structure cannot stand."

**F**ROM the signing of the Versailles Treaty, economic injustice continued to negate the hope that we had fought a war to end wars. Germany, probably more than any other people, needed surcease from conflict—freedom to produce and exchange, and live in peace. Though she took on the form of a Republic, she persisted, however, in clinging to the old ways. The mischievous effects of self-imposed restrictions on her economic life and the stupid anti-trade policies of the rest of the world, conspired to arouse in the Teutonic mind a bitterness against her "encirclement." Still, from what we know of the remarkable abilities of that people, is it not reasonable to assume that they could have produced and prospered within their own borders—provided they had been ready to discard the practices that had brought about an artificial scarcity of their land and resources? Despite these limitations, they produced wealth sufficient to pay for billions of dollars in armaments. Had this effort been expended in constructive pursuits, it would have materially raised the standard of comfort, and inspired a peaceful attitude. But the Junkers and their satellites would not have it so. As a result the masses fell easy prey to the mirage of Lebensraum. What followed was a fulfillment of Henry George's prediction: "Strong, unscrupulous men, rising up upon occasion, will become the exponents of blind popular desires or fierce popular passions, and dash aside forms that have lost their vitality." With the stage thus set, it would have been surprising indeed had the Reich failed to envisage another *Tag* when it might rise again and destroy its enemies.

**A**LARMED at the possibility of an extension of the Blitzkrieg, our own Congress has voted a tremendous sum for the national defense. The source of the appropriation has not been given much thought. A matter of even graver concern is the likelihood of legislation that will curb our individual liberties. The combating of "fifth column" tactics is certain to create a system of espionage. Suspension of civil rights will undoubtedly

be urged to implement the technique required for ferreting out subversive elements.

**W**HILE the democracies are in no small degree responsible for the present state of affairs, we can hardly on that account be indifferent to their misfortunes. Nor would it serve any useful purpose to pass moral judgment on the aggressors. From time immemorial history has produced relentless warriors, and they have come to be accepted as great figures. Rather, we wish only to point out that our hopes of economic liberation are bound up with the fate of democracy. For in its framework are the means of effecting such reforms as the people want. That they are as yet unaware of what constitutes the true public welfare is no fault of democracy.

**G**EORGEISTS frequently become discouraged at the indifference of humanity to the greatest of all economic evils—the system of land tenure that bars them from the natural opportunities to which they are born. Nevertheless, under democracy it is possible to put an end to this injustice, and there *are* signs of progress. Denmark and other countries have shown the way. In the United States there are indications of an awakening to the seriousness of the economic problem. Legislators may soon be impelled to heed the proposal of socializing the rent of land and abolishing taxes. The right of free speech and free press, under democracy, offers the hope that this reform may be attained through educational processes.

**P**ERHAPS the proposed defense program will give the law makers an opportunity to finance it in the only equitable way—by a direct levy on the land values of the nation. They might be reminded that this method was employed to raise Federal taxes in the early days of our Republic. The comparative ease with which the national defense requirements could be thus carried out would encourage the application of the same principle to the payment of all social services.

**T**HERE are disturbing reports that the present conflict is to be augmented by the entry of new belligerents. Our plans for defense are to be stepped up accordingly. Equally disconcerting is the proposal that they be financed out of new taxes on industry. If legislation embodying such a mistake is passed, the entire armament program may be jeopardized. It is a matter to which Georgeists should give their immediate attention.