

# LAND & LIBERTY

MONTHLY JOURNAL FOR LAND VALUE TAXATION AND FREE TRADE

Forty-seventh Year.—No. 549

FEBRUARY, 1940

2d. By Post, 2s. 6d. per annum

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## EUROPE IN TRAVAIL

### SPECULATION IN AGRICULTURAL LAND

### THE RIGHTS OF MAN—BY HENRY GEORGE

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## THE FUTURE IS TO THE GANGSTER—UNLESS

It is just over sixty years ago since Henry George in the concluding chapters of *Progress and Poverty* devoted himself to a consideration of what the future of our civilization might be. The forebodings he then expressed caused him to be dismissed by the Duke of Argyll as a pessimist, but we can now see in the light of what has happened, especially in the last few years, by what profound understanding of the moral, political and economic forces operative in human societies his thought was guided.

The tendency of modern development, he said, "has been towards political and legal equality—to the abolition of slavery; to the abrogation of status; to the sweeping away of hereditary privileges; to the substitution of parliamentary for arbitrary government; to the right of private judgment in matters of religion; to the more equal security in person and property of high and low, weak and strong; to the greater freedom of movement and occupation, of speech and of the Press."

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In Germany, in Russia and elsewhere we have seen these rights trampled under foot with the cynical observation that they are marks not of progress but of decadence. Parliamentary government has been swept away, arbitrary government by an individual or a small ruling clique has replaced it; the succession to the dictatorship, if not hereditary, is to be bequeathed by the Führer to a successor designated by him as if it were so much personal property; freedom of religious worship is destroyed; the equal status of all citizens is at an end; those who are members of a particular race are treated as outlaws who can be harassed and pillaged with impunity; freedom of movement is gone; human beings are uprooted from the homes in which they and their fathers have lived and are dumped hither and thither to serve some political purpose; the Press, the radio, and every means of disseminating opinion or knowledge is placed under the control of the dictatorship, to be used for its ends and its ends only; the writings of the scientist are thrown on the flames; the

laws are abrogated or suspended without form or ceremony at the instance of one man; the child is moulded in the school from its earliest years to be the servile instrument of the oppressor, to be a spy, a denunciator and informer even against its own parents.

And let us not say that this cannot happen in other countries. Already there are groups in every country who condone and applaud this movement, who say that democracy is an evil thing and who seek to place some form of dictatorship in its stead.

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Again with unerring insight Henry George puts his finger on the fundamental causes. "When the disparity of condition increases, so does universal suffrage make it easy to seize the source of power, for the greater is the proportion of power in the hands of those who feel no direct interest in the conduct of government; who, tortured by want and embruted by poverty, are ready to sell their votes to the highest bidder or follow the lead of the most blatant demagogue; or who, made bitter by hardships, may even look upon profligate and tyrannous government with the satisfaction we may imagine the proletarians and slaves of Rome to have felt, as they saw a Caligula or Nero raging among the rich patricians." It is a picture which might have been painted after the event instead of before, so truly does it depict what we have seen with our own eyes happening in the last few years.

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And this also: "As corruption becomes chronic; as public spirit is lost; as traditions of honour, virtue, and patriotism are weakened; as law is brought into contempt and reforms become hopeless; then in the festering mass will be generated volcanic forces which shatter and rend when seeming accident gives them vent. 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. The sword will again be mightier than the pen, and in carnivals of destruction brute energy

and wild frenzy will alternate with the lethargy of a declining civilization." "In the decline of civilization, communities do not go down by the same paths that they came up. For instance, the decline of civilization as manifested in government would not take us back from republicanism to constitutional monarchy, and thence to the feudal system; it would take us to imperialism and anarchy."

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Henry George is right when he says that "one of the characteristics of barbarism is the low regard for the rights of person and property," and yet the phrase "law and order" has in our time become almost a term of contempt. Why? Is it not because of the instinctive feeling that law, as it exists, is framed by the rich and privileged to protect their riches and privileges, that it is not framed for the protection of the common man, but for his oppression? Those who do not desire to see our civilization go down to destruction, who wish to preserve what is worth while in it, must devote themselves more insistently than ever to reforming our institutions so that law is brought into harmony with morals; so that it is no longer the buttress of privilege and monopoly, so that there is for all men equality of economic opportunity as well as of religious and political freedom.

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The tariffs and privileges which enable some men to levy a private tax on others in the form of higher prices must be swept away. The barriers which prevent men from getting to the land, the fountain-head of wealth, must be broken down. It must no longer be the prerogative of the few to levy toll upon the many for the enjoyment of the advantages which the exertion of all have created. The land values which are due to the community's effort must go into the community's purse and the burdensome, restrictive and unjust taxes which are levied upon labour and production must be repealed.

It is only thus that we shall reconcile law and morals, and save ourselves from the dangers which are so visibly impending.

In presenting his annual report to shareholders of the Chase National Bank, Mr Winthrop W. Aldrich commented on the nature of the peace which would follow the present conflict. He maintained (according to the report in the *Glasgow Herald*, 10th January) that if it was to have any real permanency then the multitudinous barriers which at the outbreak of war prohibited or unduly hampered trade between nations must be removed, and goods must be allowed to move freely and in volume over international boundaries. It was towards achieving this end that Mr Aldrich visualized the important role which the United States could play in view of its great economic strength and he suggested that one of the most vital contributions would be stabilization of exchanges.

It is apposite to note that Pertinax in an article in the *Daily Telegraph* (22nd January) indicating the various shades of opinion in France on "peace aims," says that the creed of the Socialists and others who have been the supporters in the past of the League of Nations is: "European Federation, arbitration, disarmament, collective security, free trade, and so forth."

Similarly, Mr Chamberlain in his broadcast of 26th November said that "there can be no lasting peace unless there is a full and constant flow of trade between the nations concerned, for only by increased interchange of goods and services can the standard of living be improved."

The growing acknowledgment of the necessity of freedom of trade is significant. At last there appears to be hope of checking the disastrous retrogression to protectionism.

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Preaching at a service of remembrance and dedication in Glasgow University Chapel on 12th November, 1939 (*Glasgow Herald* report), Dr A. D. Lindsay, the Master of Balliol, said:

In these days the liberty of our heritage had enemies far more insidious and formidable than Nazidom. These enemies were vanity, aimlessness, frustration and the bondage of corruption. The political counterpart of this brave new world of vanity was called mass democracy. We had been learning lately how the corruption of the highest things in Christian civilization speedily put men into bondage; but the worst bondage was not declared open slavery, but the bondage of our own impotence.

With that verbiage the Master of Balliol throws a smoke screen over the problem that faces him. Why cannot he tackle it courageously? What is the use of talking of "vanity, aimlessness, frustration, the bondage of corruption," and the rest to people who have to work, and work hard, often for a bare living? Surely the enemies of liberty are the obstructions to liberty. Enemy No. 1: The monopoly and privilege that can hold "our heritage" to ransom. Enemy No. 2: The system of taxation which hampers and penalises all production. What puts men into bondage is the fear of offending vested interest; and so, in the high places, voices that would call for social justice are silenced—the bondage of corruption in very truth.

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The results of the inflation of the currency in Germany in 1922-23 are strikingly depicted in Mr Rothay Reynolds' recent book *When Freedom Shrieked*. "The people who suffered most were those with fixed incomes derived from investments. Those with business incomes and foresight sold stocks and shares and invested their money in land or in house property. Others saw their fortunes vanish." As a particular illustration he cites the case of Hugo Stinnes who "acquired a control over 1,535 independent businesses, including eighty-one coal mines, forty-nine brown coal fields, fifty-seven banking and insurance firms, eighty-three railway and shipping concerns, chemical factories, sugar refineries, iron-works, steel-works, hotels, estates, newspapers and 100 factories of metal goods." He adds that "when the struggle was over and the German Government had raised an international loan of £40,000,000, over £36,000,000 of it were handed to the Ruhr magnates to indemnify their losses."

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