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"There Is No Escape"

by AGNES DE MILLE



WE are now at the hour of choice, and the choice is not between communism and capitalism, as we practice it (I use this term in its loose, common, Marxist sense—for this kind of capitalism I think is doomed), but between communism and reformed economics—communism and a better society. We're going to have one or the other—there's no question about that. And if we value anything in our culture we're going to have to work fast. We cannot lie down to sleep peacefully with *status quo*; *status quo* has been jerked right off from under us.

I think Fidel Castro is to the economic and political world a lesson and a warning. Perhaps we need something this brutal to make us face up to fundamentals. Possibly many thousands of unborn Americans will be spared suffering because he's making

us think and he's making us take action. How did Castro happen?

Cuba, as you know, is the richest sugar growing country in the world. A friend of mine, Mr. X, along with his associates, produced six per cent of the Cuban sugar, and they handled thirty-three and a third per cent of all the sugar export. He told me the average worker's year in Cuba among the cane handlers, was three months out of twelve. The other nine months they lived as bonded slaves, in debt to the company store.

So because he was a liberal and interested in Georgist ideas, he made investigations to see if some of the waste products could be used so that the working period could be lengthened. He found products which could have been used in building—and Cuba has a tremendous problem in housing.

(Continued on Page 14)

"No Lamps Ever Go Out"

HELENA Cobden Hirst, grand-niece of Richard Cobden, famed British free trader, on being invited to speak at the Henry George School banquet in New York on June 21st, replied with heartfelt greetings to Countess Tolstoy and said she was "honored and quite overcome." Having been acquainted with Anna de Mille and her daughter, Agnes, she sent her special love to Agnes de Mille "so gallant in her courage and determination to arrive 'at the best' with the staunch and loving care of her very dear mother."

Mrs. Hirst wrote from Sussex, not far from Richard Cobden's old home, which has now become the YMCA Dunford College, a center for informational good will courses attended by students representing all countries, races and creeds. Thus people are

again being awakened to a realization of what Cobden stood for and accomplished for his country.

"We are all going through very rapid and great changes," she wrote, "but the eternal problems arise in new forms. Not so new, but only clothed in other guises. We are indeed grateful for all the men and women in all countries who have held up lamps to light the way to a better world."

"It is encouraging to think you are carrying on those ideals which are needed more than ever today. My grand-uncle, like Henry George and Leo Tolstoy, saw things clearly ahead of their times, as all great-minded folk do. There will always be groups of people who follow the light. No lamps ever go out even if sometimes temporarily out of sight."

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(Continued from page 1)

And there were chemical products that could have been used in medicine—Cuba has great need of medical help.

He went to Batista and suggested that with government help to support these new processes the working period of the whole Island could be extended to eight months, and Batista said it was a fine idea but he was busy just then.

The other sugar growers, the great fruit companies, were uninterested, they were perfectly happy; they were making millions. X's company owned half a million acres of Cuban land outright—there was no land tax and no income tax. The tax was solely on the product of labor.

Of course Castro happened. If you were asked to sit down and make a blueprint for the basis of a revolution, could you do better? Isn't this the

seedbed out of which revolution grows? Well, Mr. X and his associates made a plan. If the recent invasion had been successful they would have put it to work.

First they would get an honest judiciary. He said there had been one once, not within the memory of any living man, but there could be one again. Everything was predicated on that. Then they would try the Batistianas, and if they found they were really guilty of theft, they would confiscate their lands. These would be given to the people who wished to use them, on a graduated tax which in five years would approach the entire annual rental value. As a corollary they also intended to set up machinery for borrowing and lending money.

This plan of course could not be implemented. They offered the other

plans for the extra usage of the discards of the sugar cane to Castro, thinking to put their discoveries to some good use and help the people of Cuba. I'm not sure what Castro said, if he said anything, but I think in plain Spanish it was "nyet."

What about the rest of Latin America? Mexico's on the brink. Venezuela is seething. Brazil is ready to blow up at any second. Peru is in very bad shape, and the whole Caribbean is in a state of flux and terror and trouble.

"Have you taken the plan to anyone else?" I asked Mr. X. "Will they listen to you? Don't they see what's happening?"

And he said, "No, they will not listen—they see, but they will do nothing. They want to hold on to what they have."

Now this, of course, is suicide. You would think, wouldn't you, being so close, that some of those people would let go of their great holdings—would see that they had strong and honest governments, rather than go down under the wheels? What I've suggested *has* had historical precedent. The Samurai of Japan did give up voluntarily a part of their great feudal holdings in the 19th century in order to join the contemporary world. England effected a major revolution during the last war without one drop of blood.

But these people are doing nothing. When I say "these people" I mean us—because we're deeply involved.

I think there are two lines we can follow. We can be smarter than we've been in international relationship (some of the others have been considerably smarter than we), and we could be more ruthless—but this is repugnant to us. It's against all our training and heritage. We have been dreadfully ruthless at times in our history, but usually in small groups. We have a national conscience—we don't

always use it, but we've got it. And I think it would be disastrous to us as a people if we ever tried nationally and publicly to be ruthless.

There's another alternative, as I said. It's a novel point of view. We could be honest. We could arrange not to be caught in dirty little lies, not by just being smart about concealing them, but by not telling them.

We could arrange not to be hypocritical in the dirty little boasts and we could stand behind our statements. We may hate tyrants but we could choose our friends better, I think. As long as we are friends with Castro, Jimenez or Batista, nothing we say is going to cut any ice anywhere else. We are always trying to play both sides of a problem. Jimenez left Venezuela with something like a hundred millions of his country's treasury, and where is he now? In Miami, snug as a bug. We lost Venezuela by giving him asylum.

If someone had raped our treasury and gone off with an equivalent sum and sought asylum in England, what would we think? That sort of thing happened once and we were very explicit about what we thought. We backed it up with a good load of gunpowder. We keep trying to buy love—not earn it—buy it. And that's an old, old practice and it has a lot of names, all unattractive. We are universally loathed and distrusted, because the world thinks we are hypocrites and in fact, we are.

We have got to clean house. We use so many big, fancy words about freedom and brotherhood and all that. We throw them around like confetti. We throw them around all the dreadful districts in this country and all over Latin America and Puerto Rico and the Far East where people are starving and deprived, weary, sick and delinquent.

Booker T. Washington said, "There is no escape, man drags man down, or

man lifts man up." George said, "Whence shall come the new barbarians? Go through the squalid quarters of great cities, and you may see, even now, their gathering hordes!"

As long as there are groups of exploited people here there are potential revolutionaries—call them subversive or anything you like—and there should be. We're men, and men do not go to the slaughter like animals. If communism did not exist we would perforce engender something as bad out of the suffering in the next street. We carry our own cancer.

There's another fancy word I wish we'd remember. It's an 18th century word—and it's justice.

Now what can we do, practically—you and I here who have no great legislative influence or power? Well, we know what we believe is right—and we must speak out.

I think we can first attack the schools and do it this summer. Of course none of the schools are in session, but we all have children or know children, and we know their teachers. In New York City the schools teach pretty good economics on a basic elementary level. Their definitions are sound, but they don't draw any conclusions. Get to the elementary and secondary teachers and make them think—make them study.

Get to the editors of newspapers get behind any civic legislation that is any good, and push. Get to magazine editors—get articles in magazines. And don't harp on the name "single

tax" or "Henry George." It doesn't matter whether George gets the credit if we get the idea expressed clearly. George himself always said, "don't vote for the candidate—vote for the principle."

And we need to reach our legislators and our State Department. They *will* finally be reached through the printed word and through constant badgering.

There are certain freedoms which did not come lightly into the world nor into our history. The ground of America is soaked with the blood of people who died for them. These are the freedom to speak, the freedom to associate, the freedom to learn the truth, the freedom to pray, the freedom to ask questions, and most important of all, the freedom to object. We are now at the point where we have to say whether we think they are valuable enough to fight for, on any level that seems absolutely necessary.

I want to remind you of the last statement of the Declaration of Independence: "for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence" (how this phrase keeps coming into 18th century statements—"In God we Trust," "so help us God"—they're like windows open to radiance), "we mutually pledge to each other our Lives (that's not enough anymore), our Fortunes (and when did you hear of an American giving his fortune for his country?) and our sacred Honor."

From address at annual banquet of the Henry George School, New York