Georgeism, Communism: Which?

RADIO TALK OVER WCFL, APRIL, 1931, BY JOHN LAWRENCE MONROE

HERETOFORE this country has been considered proof against radicalism because of its large and prosperous middle class who have been living under the illusion of lasting prosperity due to the ready conversion of natural resources into quickly realizable wealth. But this condition is rapidly changing. The natural resources are to a considerable extent dissipated where not monopolized. The middle class are beginning to feel the pressure just as the dispossessed class have always felt it.

Now that the protective armor of the middle class is growing thinner and showing perforations, the march of events makes it clear that there is not a great deal of time left for the revamping of social theories that have proved themselves illusory. Communism has rooted itself in one of the world's great empires. With its inception little more than ten years ago, it stands foremost in the economic consciousness of the world today. While Communism is a nightmare to the entrenched monopolies of all countries, it is also a growing hope to constantly increasing numbers of the world's dispossessed.

The mounting cost of government and the increased exactions of landlordism are causing the middle class to discard the rose-colored glasses of the privileged for the darker-hued spectacles of the exploited. The charges of taxation and of privately appropriated ground rent are falling with telling weight upon the middle class, which are becoming rapidly dispossessed, thereby becoming easy prey to the conjuring promises advanced by communistic thought. They are coming to feel that they have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Communism can grow only when the average man is without a means to make a living. It is only then that any change is welcomed in which there is hope for a more equitable distribution of wealth.

Individualism very rapidly becomes collectivism when men are disemployed and when families suffer from radically reduced incomes if not actual poverty. When economic power becomes so centralized that the middle class can no longer share in the fruits of privilege, this middle class turn to fight some superficial manifestation of power if enlightenment does not direct its furor against privilege itself.

Witness the independent merchants in their battle against the chain store. Oppressed by landlordism in high ground rents, by taxation in burdensome levies on improvements and stocks-in-trade, and by the power monopoly in excessive rates, the independents, by collective action, seek to destroy an industrial personification of their distress, the chain store. Oppressed by the same factors of landlordism, indirect taxation and the power monopoly, the farmers, by collective action, seek to overcome the handicap that has been set upon them.

While privilege is thought by its beneficiaries to be more safely entrenched in the United States than in certain Old World countries of the past, the people of this country are more enlightened. The people can grasp with greater clarity and act with less hesitation in dealing with proposed remedies. Therefore the real remedy must be sought and applied before the masses of the people are carried away by the false promises of Communism.

Social relationships have changed in the last few generations, but certain elementary considerations remain with which the people are primarily concerned: those of access to the land for homes and for production. The problem of the present, then, in its essentials, is one of land for the people.

The dominating influence of the land problem in history is seen from the struggle in Roman history of the fifth century before Christ down to the present time. For example, in 486 B. C. Spurius Cassius was beheaded and his house razed to the ground because, seeing the distress of his people which called aloud for a remedy, he struck at the root of privilege by proposing a return of the land to the people. A hundred years later the Licinian Laws provided that no person should hold more than 332 acres of land, the balance to be divided among the destitute landless commoners. These laws falling into abeyance, the Gracchi brothers valiantly but vainly sought to revive them in 133 B. C. And Rome went on to decay.

Nearer to our own time, in the eighteenth century, the people of France, outside of the clergy, nobles and crown, held but two-fifths of the land, and the French Revolution was primarily a demand for a redistribution of the land. In the early part of the present century the Russian Dumas repeatedly asked for the land, and it was common editorial comment in this country that the refusal of the Czar and of the aristocracy to accede to these demands would result in the loss not only of their lands but of their heads as well. How true a prophecy!

The comparatively small amount of unemployment in France is not due merely to static population, for its proportionate increase in population since the World War compares measurably with that of the United States. Nor is it due largely to after-war effects. It is for the most part due to the fact that more than 53 per cent of the French people are on rent-free land. The peasant families of France are independent social units, jealously guarding their long tradition of home ownership. There is but a small surplus class in industry, as shown by the fact that men recently were imported to complete government projects. Those who would otherwise be unemployed in France are where the people of this country could be—on the land, the safety-valve against industrial depression.

While the prospect of higher wages in the American cities has drawn many from the land, this has not reduced the price of land in productive agricultural sections of the country. The workers when out of employment find they can't return to the land. The high price of sites both in

the city and in the country drives men to the unproductive mountain and desert lands or into the labor markets of industrial centers to compete for starvation wages. Tenantry in industry and in agriculture increases yearly. Thus a dispossessed class are growing more numerous in town and country, giving rise to a blind discontent that does not recognize individual rights in its demands.

Under the Single Tax the natural advantages of individualism may be preserved by adopting that only form of collectivism which a just civilization should secure: collectivism in the appropriation by taxation of the rental value of land.

Those who would preserve the virility of American individualism *must choose between collectivism in natural opportunities and collectivism in everything.*

The history of civilization serves notice that the participants in landlordism must yield their special privilege of extortion or yield all.

This is the choice of Georgeism or Communism.

Philip Snowden's Great Budget Speech

HERE is the speech of Philip Snowden on the passage of the Finance Bill, July 3, by a vote of 274 to 222. The Chancellor defined the Bill as a "Money Bill" and therefore it passes into law without modification by the House of Lords:

The right hon. Gentleman (Mr. Neville Chamberlain), in his concluding remarks, called the attention of the House to the fact that upon the Order Paper today something like 200 names are attached to a Motion for the rejection of this Bill, and that, he said, was an indication of the views of the Opposition upon these proposals. It came as no surprise to see that. I should have had grave suspicions about the efficacy and justice and purpose of these proposals if they had received the support of that party, whose purpose was described by one of their own Members a few days ago as looking after vested interests. I can assure the right hon. Gentleman and his associates that when that day comes and we have to take the verdict of the country upon our proposals to deal with the land monopoly, we shall not shirk the issue.

Before I go further, I should like—and I have a special obligation to do this—to associate myself with the just tribute that has been paid from many quarters of the House to the invaluable assistance that I have received in the conduct of this Bill. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary and to the President of the Board of Trade; and I am sure that it will not be regarded as invidious if I say that I am grateful beyond measure for the assistance that I have received from the Solicitor-General. His legal knowledge, his ability, his powers of debate have justly earned for him a high place in Parliamentary history; and his courtesy, his tact and his toleration are so admirable that even I could hardly do better. (*Loud laughter.*)

The land clauses in this Bill have emerged in a somewhat different form. I have never expected that I should be able to carry them without making some concession, but I was determined to maintain intact and unimpaired the essential principles of the Bill—and the Bill, as it will pass in the next quarter of an hour, does maintain those principles. It maintains the principle which was defined by the right hon. Gentleman the Member for Carnarvon Boroughs (Mr. Lloyd George), of a tax upon all site values, and it maintains wholly intact the principle and practice of a valuation for arriving at the real value of all the sites which will be subject to taxation, excluding, of course, those which are exempted under the Bill. A first Measure dealing with a great and complicated subject like this is bound to show imperfections. I never expected that I should be able, as a first Measure, to produce a perfectly watertight Measure. Any Measure is bound to inflict what may appear to be injustices in certain individual cases. What we have to do is to try to confer the largest measure of good by what we do, and at the same time to try to reduce the injustices or hardships that it may entail.

We have heard a great deal about the alleged injustice of imposing a tax upon land value which the owner of land has already paid. But the House of Commons ought to realize that this land tax proposal is for the future, and that in the future those alleged injustices will not operate; because it has been repeatedly stated, and it was repeated by the right hon. Member for Hillhead (Sir R. Horne) this afternoon, that the effect of these taxation proposals will be to reduce the capital value of land by at least one-twelfth. Indeed, it may be anticipated that the reduction will be more, because, when the tax is imposed, it will be the object of the owner to sell the land, land will be thrown into the market, and competition in the sale of land will have the inevitable result of reducing its capital value.

There has been a great deal of talk about double taxation. But, if this tax raises revenue—about which the right hon. Gentleman appeared to have some doubts—something can be done with that revenue. It will be used for the purpose of reducing taxation in other directions and, therefore, there will be a reduction of taxation exactly corresponding with any increase of taxation that may have been imposed by the operation of this Measure. The scheme of the right hon. Gentleman the Member of Carnarvon Boroughs (the Budget of 1909) was complicated, as I think he will agree, by trying to deal with too many aspects of the question at the same time. Ours is a much simpler way and, in that respect, it is the first real attack upon the land monopoly of the country.

I hope more courageous Parliaments will in the future deal with this problem more drastically than we have done. The land monopoly is the greatest burden on industry. It imposes a tax of hundreds of millions a year upon the productive enterprise of the country, and, instead of this