

IMMIGRATION AND LAND MONOPOLY

From an Address of Louis F. Post, Assistant Secretary of Labour, at the Anniversary of the Hebrew Sheltering Arms at New York City, February 27th, 1916.

What you as Jews demand for yourselves, you demand for all mankind. That is the spirit of the Jewish law, if I read it aright. That is what you were taught in the wilderness by the greatest of all law givers in history. The democratic principle has come down in your blood, if there is any such thing as inheritance; that principle of love for God as the essence of all that is good and all that is true—of love for God and love for your neighbour as yourself. That is the Jewish law, and Christianity has appropriated it. That is true democracy the whole world over.

I have, too, a personal interest in this meeting. In looking over your list of directors and advisers I find names there of men who are respected and dear to me. There are Brandeis and Mack. And there is Mr. Wolf, who has just spoken here, one of your representatives in Washington. Then there is your other representative, Mr. Gottlieb.

I have frequently the assistance of these and other representatives of your organisation; and I can say for you and for them, that never to my knowledge have I had a request from you or them to let anyone into this country unless it has been inspired by humane sentiments and a fair and rational interpretation of the law. Your representatives realise that my duty is to enforce the law without regard to person or creed or race. And I do not hesitate to tell you, my friends, that as far as I am concerned, the exclusion law will be administered according to its purpose.

With its spirit I personally have no sympathy whatever, and I am speaking personally here—as a citizen, not as an official. As a democrat I cannot have sympathy with the principle of exclusion from our country, but as an official I will enforce that law as the lawmakers intended it to be enforced.

It is a pathetic duty. Many of you can realise this better than I can. A family comes across that great wilderness of ocean to get away from economic pressure, industrial pressure, political persecution. They see the Goddess of Liberty loom up as they approach New York. They are full of hope. The promised land is before them. But they find they cannot come ashore. They pass the Goddess of Liberty again, but on their way to Ellis Island. Then they pass immigration officials in a line to be examined. They answer questions. Possibly some one of the family comes within the provisions of the exclusion law. That one is excluded. The case is appealed to the Secretary of Labour, who has very little discretion. And then it may be that the excluded one must go back to a homeless land instead of entering this land of promise.

Now, my friends, some of the things I am going to say to you, you may not like; but, standing on that most exalted plane of human association, the brotherhood of man, I am going to assume a brother's privilege to say what I think.

One of these unpleasant things is the fact that exclusion of aliens is necessary. It is going to become more and more drastic. Not because I want it so. I tell you I don't. But it is going to be so just the same. And, more than that, the same thing that has made it necessary, and will make it more and more necessary, is going to sweep you, yourselves and your children into the stream of exclusionists. I do not mean that the exclusion of aliens is essentially necessary. Let me emphasise that. I mean that it is necessary under existing conditions.

We did not always have exclusion laws. I am not as old as Mr. Wolf, but I can remember when we had no exclusion laws. I can remember when it would have been political death to any political leader in almost any part of this country to have advocated exclusion laws for aliens. But the exclusion laws came. Why?

We are told by Senator Reed, and I do not doubt the Senator's assurances, that the principal reason for making the exclusion law more drastic is to keep the Jews out of this country. I can take you to other men who will tell you the same thing. But it is also true that the exclusion laws are urged from other motives. Some say they are urged for the purpose of keeping another kind of religionists out of the country. Some have still other motives. Plenty of reasons are urged, openly or not openly, for making the exclusion laws more drastic. But the original laws for exclusion were not for the purpose of keeping out particular religionists or races.

I will tell you what started exclusion legislation; and it is still the great leverage, whatever other motives there may be. The reason we did not have exclusion laws when I was young is because there was an abundance of cheap land in this country. There was no pressure of population; yet the population was half or more than half what it is now. We used to sing in those days a song inviting the oppressed of all nations to come to our ports. Part of the refrain of that song was "Uncle Sam is rich enough to give us all a farm." It was true. There was an enormous amount of cheap or free land.

But Congress, soon after those days, got a scare on—a wonderful scare. They were afraid that this cheap land would get up on its hind legs and run over to the Pacific Ocean and dump itself in. So, in order to keep the land here, in order to prevent its running away, Congress passed laws which made land grants galore. They gave the land to greedy owners to hold it in its place. They gave to States land for schools; and the States also were so afraid the lands would run away that they sold them for a song. To keep the lands from running away, don't you see?

Congress gave eighty million acres to corporations for building continental railroads. For the Government? For the people? No, for themselves. Now, wasn't that a fine scheme? They gave these lands away in order to pay railroad financiers for building railroads—for themselves! I figure that those railroad grants alone would make a path five miles wide all around the earth. All that land was given to railroad companies for building railroads for themselves. Of course they were to see that the lands didn't leave the country; and in that respect they have been faithful, for the lands are still here. But they are monopolised.

That sort of thing went on until Uncle Sam hadn't any farms to give. And with the rest went mineral deposits—coal and iron that were here before the children of Israel went upon that long pilgrimage out of Egypt. We gave them all away. And now we are short of land—not of vacant land, but of cheap land.

It is so the whole country over. We are short of cheap land, although there is an abundance of good land that is not in use. Look at the city of New York. Is there a spot that is more congested with people? Yet New York is not so very much more than half built upon even on Manhattan Island. It has plenty of vacant spaces and insufficiently used spaces held out of full use by enormous prices. This is indicative of the process which led to the alien exclusion laws. It is the kind of thing that will make exclusion laws necessary as long as we maintain the institution which for short I will call land monopoly.

You tell me that foreigners should have the right to come into this country. I say so, too. They are our brethren

and should have the right to come here as brethren. But when they come here, what then? Is it enough that foreigners shall be allowed to pass Ellis Island? Is it enough that foreigners shall be allowed to cross the boundary line into this country? Haven't they the same right to a spot of earth when they get here? But there is too little room in this country—not only for the foreigners who cross the ocean, but for the foreigners that come down from heaven, and there are a good many of them. We haven't got any exclusion laws for them, yet. But they come, and they are filling up the country—a country which is crowded. I do not mean that this country is crowded literally. I mean that so much of it has been passed over into the ownership of a few that there is no room left for the great mass.

Now for the effect, which has caused alien exclusion laws. In the early 60's the wage-working class of this country began to see their jobs slipping away from them. If they had stopped to think, they might have suspected the true cause. They might have said, "The land of our country is monopolised so that there isn't enough land to go around." But they didn't stop to think. All they knew was that immigrants were taking their jobs away by working for less than they were getting. Then we had the foreigner question. It wasn't a religious or a race question. Do not imagine that. Do not imagine that it was national. It was a bread and butter question.

I want to illustrate this. Once I had occasion to talk to a man in Texas, an old-time slave owner, and in our conversation I asked him to tell me about the race question down there. He answered, "I will tell you about the race question in a few words. When the white man owned the 'nigger,' there was no race question; if the 'nigger' owned the white man, there would be no race question; but when the 'nigger' and the white man both want the same job at the same time, then there is a race question." Something like that is what happened back in the 60's. The American wage worker found foreigners getting his jobs, and then there was a race question, a religious question, an alien exclusion question.

When all our cheap land had been taken away from the people, when the people who worked for wages began to find out that jobs were getting scarce—then we began to pass exclusion laws. And that condition of scarcity of jobs is what is maintaining those laws to-day. It is what will make them more drastic. It is what will make you and your children favour exclusion laws against belated foreigners. Until we alter these land monopoly conditions exclusion laws will keep out your friends.

The message I want to leave with you is this: If you are opposed to exclusion laws, you must strike at their cause. You have got to make this country free, really free; and no country is free where the mass of the people have no right to a place on the land without paying higher and higher prices to land monopolists for the opportunity.

If you abolish land monopoly—I shall not take the time to indicate how it may be done—but if you do it, you will remove the cause of alien exclusion. Give us cheap land in this country once more, get rid of land monopoly, and there will be no necessity to organise to fight any exclusion law. Cheap land means dear men, and dear land means cheap men. We have dear land now. Consequently we have got cheap men. Consequently these who are at work are in conflict with foreigners coming into the labour market at lower wages. It is because dear land means cheap men, and because we now have dear land, that exclusion laws must be. They are necessary in order to keep out men that will work cheaper.

I may be wrong; I may not. Think it over. That is all that any democrat has a right to ask of any other

democrat. Think it over. And, if when you think it over you agree with me, come out and do what you can to abolish land monopoly. Do more if you can, but at least do that.

I want to thank you for all the assistance that I have had from your organisation officially, and from your representatives in Washington. I thank you, too, for the opportunity to sit among you this afternoon in one of the most democratic, most Christian, most Jewish of meetings that I ever have had the pleasure of sitting in.

A REVOLUTIONARY TALE

Colonel Edward M. House, known as President Wilson's unofficial adviser, is said to be the author of a novel, entitled PHILIP DRU: ADMINISTRATOR, published anonymously. The publisher's announcement mentions this report, and states further that Colonel House has declined to deny it. A recent article in the NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW says the same. Whoever the author may be, he has no cause to feel ashamed of his work. The story is a tale of a revolution in the United States led by Philip Dru, who becomes administrator and revises the laws. Though he makes the mistake of providing income and inheritance taxes, some wiser legislation is told about in the following:—

"He directed that the tax on realty both in the country and the city should be upon the following basis: Improvements on city property were to be taxed at one-fifth of their value, and the naked property either in town or country at two-thirds of its value. The fact that country property used for agricultural purposes was improved should not be reckoned. In other words, if A had one hundred acres with eighty acres of it in cultivation and otherwise improved, and B had one hundred acres beside him of just as good land, but not in cultivation or improved, B's land should be taxed as much as A's.

"In cities and towns taxation was to be upon a similar basis. For instance, when there was a lot, say, one hundred feet by one hundred feet with improvements upon it worth three hundred thousand dollars, and there was another lot of the same size and value, the improved lot should be taxed only sixty thousand more than the unimproved lot; that is, both lots should be taxed alike, and the improvement on the one should be assessed at sixty thousand dollars, or one-fifth of its actual value.

"This, Dru pointed out, would deter owners from holding unimproved realty for the purpose of getting the unearned increment made possible by the thrift of their neighbours. In the country it would open up land for cultivation now lying idle, provide homes for more people, cheapen the cost of living to all, and make possible better schools, better roads and a better opportunity for the successful co-operative marketing of products.

"In cities and towns it would mean a more homogeneous population, with better streets, better sidewalks, better sewerage, more convenient churches and cheaper rents and homes. As it was at that time, a poor man could not buy a home nor rent one near his work, but must needs go to the outskirts of his town, necessitating loss of time and cost of transportation, besides sacrificing the obvious comforts and conveniences of a more compact population."

It would have been better had Administrator Dru abolished all taxes on improvements, incomes and inheritances, together with all other taxes on labour, and taken the entire rental value of land for public purposes. By the time the year 1920 comes round, the date set in the book for the revolution, the reforms told about therein will hardly be considered revolutionary.—(THE AMERICAN ECONOMIC LEAGUE'S BULLETIN.)