

Georgism, Americanism and Communism

By R. J. AUSTIN

[The following student-address was given at the recent commencement exercises in Los Angeles. Mr. Austin is a graduate of William Truehart's winter class in Fundamental Economics.]

MY remarks this evening may be loosely grouped under the general heading: Georgism, Americanism and Communism.

For many years I have been concerned about America. I am proud of her past, disenchanted with the present and gloomy about the future. I don't dare state that this attitude is general with members of my generation but I am confident I don't speak for myself alone. There are thousands of others who share my response to our present economic environment. These people are political malcontents—orphans without a party—because no party, at present, exists capable of giving adequate expression to their hopes and aspirations for themselves and their native land. Employment opportunities or the lack thereof, taxation, business cycles, inflation-deflation, national indebtedness, wars and the threat of wars—all these problems give pause to the young men and women each year discharged from the high schools and colleges of the country as educated Americans. And in many respects these persons are educated or at least competent to earn a living in a competitive society, but something is missing.

Cliches die such a hard death because they express great truths. This is true of: "Man does not live by bread alone." Our young person, if he be at all of an introspective turn of mind, usually becomes aware that though: "God may be in his heaven," it is vain to hope that in anything but a vague future tense all will be "right with the world." A creeping disquietude culminating in quiet desperation is a frequent course of the disease.

This attitude of mind is unfortunate for individuals and dangerous to society. All too often an individual allies himself with causes that give promise of changing the present state of affairs to one more commensurate with his notions of liberty, equality, justice and public and personal welfare. Often these are of a questionable character.

If the area of his special concern is racial discrimination and the Soviet constitution gives him promise of a better day, he is offered, ready-made, an entire social, political and economic philosophy. Such ready-made garments ill-become Americans; they bind the free mind in uncomfortable places.

If our puzzled young man be of an opposite cast of thought, if he be convinced of Aryan superiority, if he shudders for the "mongrelization of the race," the Fascist groups await him as a shepherd awaits the strayed lamb and proceed to forcefeed him their concomitant economic philosophy of state capitalism. Then it's the State Triumphant, Deutschland uber Alles, the individual be damned!

A third asylum, to which the discontent might flee is Fabian socialism of the English sort, but to me this seems to be an empty hou inhabited solely by restrictions, and paper with red tape.

I have attempted to present an outline of the state of mind many thousands of America find themselves in today—one of perplexity and desperation of varying degrees. The strangers in hell may be forgiven if they take a wrong turn in a road that promises Paradise or at least a way out of the land of "no exit."

How fortunate we malcontents are that we are not entirely hemmed in by orthodoxy on the one hand and the "isms" on the other. Suddenly in a maze of dead-end streets, a broad boulevard to a better day opens before us. The thoroughfare is Georgism. To those who have struggled in the tentacles of the "isms," an exciting ideological concept is unveiled. To those who find present-day politico-economic orthodoxy lukewarm dishwater, a voice speaks, an American voice fit to be heard with Jefferson, Franklin and Lincoln, our giants of old. George looked out upon the American scene of his time with split-vision—a great compassionate understanding for the people and a merciless appraising, an analytical eye for the malefic institutions and abuses to be found in his day as in ours.

No Mere Historian

Many men have given reports of their time. They are merely historians. George provides posterity not merely with the report but with positive focal point.

The ancient Greek physicist, Archimedes, volunteered his services to his city when an enemy fleet was in the harbor attacking the town. In the dead of night, Archimedes had his workmen transport a huge prism to an elevated cliff overlooking the harbor. The piercing rays of the morning sun focused to burning intensity on the boats in the harbor. Being constructed of wood, they caught fire and burned like tinder. The thought of Henry George can be, for us, a prism of like intensity burning the tree of economic evil at its rotten root.

"One of the most significant contra-New Course developments has been the Soviet change in the Baltic agricultural organization," according to April, 1954 News From Behind the Iron Curtain. Communist land-merging and collectivization programs were drawn four years ago, "now steps are being taken to move Baltic households together."

The two diagrams at the right seem to illustrate the de-humanizing effects of these collective programs. The pre-Communist village, however much it may have been subject to an improper land owning system, at least shows signs of an organic growth. The "Kolkhoz Settlement" seems to be squeezing everybody into a monotonous and unnatural uniformity.