

# The Georgist Journal

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## COMMENT

### CLEAR THINKING LEADS TO GOOD ACTION

There are various seminal sayings which are so apt they get repeated frequently - but with different attributions. I have heard the following ascribed to a dozen different pundits: "If we do not learn from history we are doomed to repeat it." Very wise sounding! But I have heard a criticism of this seemingly irreproachable thought (I don't remember by whom but I will not pull a name out of the hat), as follows: If we learn too much from history, we will not sufficiently recognize that new conditions may require new thinking and action. This strikes me as applicable. Every current U.S. involvement in world affairs raises the ghost of Vietnam. We forget that Vietnam raised the ghost of Munich - "don't give in to the aggressor." And Munich occurred because of the ghost of World War I - "peace in our time." And World War I was going to be a gentlemanly war as in days of yore...

Another saying - also attributed to a multitude of sages - is, "Make no small plans; they have no power to stir men's minds." In a mood to carp with glittering generalities, I will comment: Big plans may stir men's minds - and even deeds - but they often get mired down in unforeseen difficulties and disasters. Maybe it's better to dream big dreams - but in planning to realize the dreams, to break them down into smaller plans that can be realistically undertaken step by step, so that problem by problem can be met and dealt with.

"Consistency is the bugbear of little minds." In Land and Liberty this is attributed to Winston Churchill. The last time around I heard that Ralph Waldo Emerson said it. Well anyway, it's a good way out of a tight spot.

Here's another one attributed to a score of Solomons: "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is that good men do nothing." Whoever said it, we have certainly seen it exemplified many times. Still, what of the Biblical injunction, "Resist not evil", upheld by Tolstoy in the midst of the evils of his day?

In other words, we ought not succumb as captives of clever words and generalities, but should apply thought and judgment if we want to be guided to good action.

P.S. If any one can provide sources for a definitive attribution for the above quoted sayings, we'd be glad to hear about it.

R.C.