

LAND & LIBERTY

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SEPTEMBER & OCTOBER, 1969 THREE SHILLINGS

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Scientific Advance and Social Chaos

WHEN MAN first stepped on the moon—an event watched by people all over the world—we were told that “a new era” had opened. But we have been told this many times during this extraordinary century: at the very beginning of it, when Marconi tapped out his first transatlantic wireless message; when the Wright Brothers flew their contraption at Kitty Hawk; when the internal combustion “horseless carriages” began to be produced for mass consumption.

A watershed year was 1914, when “the guns of August” sounded. Many historians use that date to begin modern times. In 1917, America and Russia had their “new era,” when America was plunged into world affairs by entry into the war, and Russia had its Bolshevik Revolution and withdrew from the war.

An era ended and a new one opened that day in October, 1929, when Wall Street fell on its face; again in 1933 when both Roosevelt and Hitler came to power; when Keynes issued his *General Theory* in 1936; when World War II began in 1939; when Pearl Harbour was bombed in 1941.

That day in August, 1945 (when the Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima) was quickly dubbed the opening of the “Atomic Era.” We had another new era when Russia launched the first Sputnik in 1957. And now the moon.

Can all these “new eras” succeeding one another with bewildering rapidity be grouped under one heading? When we look them over, we find that they come under two headings: *technological advance* and *social*

chaos. While man was exploring the moon, the earth below was divided into several hostile camps. The prophets say that man is now ready to colonize space. But what social system will he bring with him?

The muse of history is unpredictable and often tosses planned "historic moments" into the dustbin. Who today remembers that planned "historic moment" of World War II when an American and a Russian general—what were their names?—made contact for the first time during the invasion of Germany at a river—which river—on what date? The things that may be remembered about the moon trip are the pioneer works of the theoreticians. Tsiolkovsky, Jules Verne, and others. For the moon trip was simply the precise execution of a plan worked out to the last details. The men who made the trip were interchangeable with other men—part of "the team"—and they were even faceless behind their moon masks. (One interesting sidelight on this matter: toy manufacturers complain they cannot sell "astronauts." Children respond more readily to toys with individual personalities, bless their natural inclinations!) Whether necessarily or not, the Era of Technology has been accompanied by a loss in emphasis on the individual.

But man is still a remarkable and resilient creature. He has overcome all the apprehensions about his ability to take the hazards of space travel: the pressures of lift-off; the effects of weightlessness; the difficulty of movement in a heavy space-suit; the aggravation of cramped quarters; the loneliness of space; the extremes of darkness and light; the problems of a planet with a different pull of gravity. Indeed, he rather enjoys these experiences, even being reluctant to return to earth; and the accidents and deaths of astronauts so far have all occurred while they have been earthbound!

The big challenge for man is in that second aspect of our century—social chaos. The problems we have not solved are those which are hitting us with increasing insistence—poverty, economic insecurity, inflation, urban decay, crime, power struggles, communism, nationalism, war. The gap between technological advance and social chaos must be closed, otherwise all is lost. Some of the quality of thought that has gone into the one must go into the other. The "alienation" of the individual and his loss of personality must be overcome, for this is one of the chief causes of today's disruptions.

Freedom in the production and exchange of wealth, and justice in its distribution, must be attained. Recognition of our planet as our common heritage must be achieved before we are worthy to colonize other planets.

If we can achieve this, *then* will we have earned the right to call it a New Era! —R.C.

News and Comment

PLAYING WITH TRADE

ONE MORE TRADE BLOC is headed for the doldrums. This time it is Nordek, an economic union of four Scandinavian countries, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland. Sweden, the most industrially advanced of the four, insists on a tight tariff wall around the union. Denmark complains that no provision has been made for her agricultural surpluses, and Norway makes a similar complaint about her fisheries. Finland wants lower tariffs on industrial imports. So the Union thus far is a stirring paper declaration that every one favours—"like motherhood," said one Nordek official.

Is there any arrangement short of full free trade that will really work?

LEGAL TAX DODGE

MANY ARE THE WAYS in which taxation distorts production.

One recent example concerned a firm which is deliberately producing faulty sponge cloth in order to avoid purchase tax. The firm, J. C. Ley, of Nottingham, had started turning out faulty stockinette.

The Customs and Excise confirmed that unbleached and undyed stockinette used for industrial purposes is exempt from purchase tax regulations if produced with a regular "ladder" fault—this is produced by removing one needle in every fifty from the machines. Provided the fault conforms to the terms of the exemption clause in the appropriate Act, there is nothing illegal in its production.

CHURCH LAND HOLDINGS

IT IS ESTIMATED that churches in the United States own about \$100 billion worth of land and buildings—mostly tax-exempt. A good part of the activity of churches is in managing their real estate interests, much of which is used not for religious but for business purposes.

While many are content with this situation, some religious leaders are becoming alarmed at what they call the "edifice complex" of contemporary Christianity. They propose a recovery of the outlook of the early church as humble servant instead of rich landlord. A few churches have even made a start by using modest structures such as barns for their activities.

If more churches can be persuaded to recapture the vision of justice and brotherhood, and disgorge their giant holdings, it may be that they will be able to look more objectively at the general problem of land monopoly and its essential immorality. It may be, too, that