

What Is Liberty?

By FRANCES GOODALE

[From banquet address at Boston, July 3.]

IT IS true that I was present at a meeting, similar to this, in 1912, and to be present now at this conference is to me a somewhat emotional experience. At that first meeting I was not only an outsider, but also a hostile and cynical young whippersnapper who thought he knew a lot about economics and thought these Georgists were very funny. I noticed then something that troubled me, and that was the way they snapped at each other. I'm happy to see that such conduct has disappeared entirely. [Laughter from everyone.]

There were two groups of Georgists in 1912. There was the group known as step-by-steppers—Louis F. Post and Professor Johnson of Harvard were the leaders of that group. And there were the "whole-hoggers," so called, led by Baldwin Hall and Frank Stevens. I thought the contest would be settled by physical combat before they got through, but it wasn't, and at the end of the three-day conference there was a dinner, something like this, and everybody sang The Land Song with great enthusiasm, because everybody thought that "single tax" would become a reality in the next year or two.

Campaigns were going on in Peublo; Houston, Texas; Oregon and California, which were very exciting and everybody's mind was centered on immediate political action. My curiosity led me ultimately to become a convinced Georgist and to take part to some extent in those campaigns which followed immediately after 1912, and which were nearly successful, even here in Massachusetts. Then the war came on and single tax and the Georgist ideas were a war casualty. There were still a few faithful souls—John Monroe's father and others kept pegging along—John Gray was one of them and a lot of others kept things lighted. The spark never went out. Fisk Warren kept the spark going with his enclave (Free Acres, New Jersey). Joe Richards called his method, not the step-by-steppers nor the whole-hoggers, but the piece-by-piecers, and finally Oscar Geiger invented what I may call the "class by classes." His method has survived the second World War as the old methods failed to survive the first World War. I think that indicates great hopes for the future.

The Spiritual Bond

Well, perhaps I have reminisced enough about this, but there is just one thing I would like to say and that is what moves me so deeply. There may be some here who, like me in 1912, have come out of curiosity and not because they are Georgists. But I have a feeling that, although you have come from all parts of the country and from other countries, I have something in common with you. There is a true fellowship of the spirit which creates a kind of social organism. We have something which binds us all together—a personality which you

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might call the "common denominator" of all of us. It creates something—a real human aggregate entity, and you can carry that on to the community and to the nation.

I did a little research on the meaning of liberty in a technical sense, and Webster's International Dictionary gives ten definitions, two of which are diametrically opposed to one another. Here is the first one: "The state of freedom. Exemption from subjection to the will of a person claiming ownership or services. Opposed to slavery, serfdom, bondage or subjection." I think that is good but it doesn't go far enough. The next one is: "privilege, exemption, franchise, immunity enjoyed by prescription or grant." Mr. Webster gives as a citation to make that clear—a quotation from Sir John Davies: "His Majesty gave not an entire county to any, much less did he grant any extraordinary liberties."

That is enough to show that the dictionary doesn't give you the complete answer, and so I hunted a little more and came across a definition which I think satisfies me. It's an inscription over one of the courthouses in Massachusetts, and it states: "Obedience to the law is liberty." Now that seems like an odd saying the first time you see it—somebody telling you what to do and what not to do—bossing you around. Is that liberty? Well, then you have to think over the question "What law?" Perhaps there is something which causes you to obey the law—the police are not so likely to restrict your liberties if you obey the law. But that is certainly not an adequate answer. I puzzled over it a long time and then I began to think about the meaning of liberty, and it seemed to me that liberty is a meaningless word unless it is related to people.

How Do People Think?

The important thing is philosophy, the premise from which one's thinking starts. Gilbert Chesterton said, "If a landlady is considering a possible lodger, it is important for her to know his solvency, but it is more important for her to know his philosophy."

So if we are thinking about people and are going to reason about people, I think it is essential that we should begin by trying to find out our own philosophy about people. In my opinion the all-important cleavage; on one side to totalitarianism, communism, Fascism and socialism; and on the other side to democracy and freedom; turns on one question: Do you or do you not believe in people? Have you or have you not faith in human beings?

There are those, and perhaps they are the majority in the world, who believe that people are naturally bad; and that unless restrained they will get worse. Their only hope is to have a government of the wise, the good and disinterested, who will teach our people from the top down, who will control them from the top down and prevent them from manifesting the evil in their nature. The question is obvious if you follow it to the logical conclusion. Overhead controls are, in the last analysis, the totalitarian state.

On the other side you have those who say, I have faith in human beings. True, they behave badly at times. They are behaving very badly at the present time; the world is in a terrible mess. But by and large if the average human being was given the free choice he would rath-

er be kind than unkind, he would rather be honest than dishonest. He does not want to be cruel. He wants to get along with his fellow men. What he needs is a chance to learn and he can learn better in freedom than he can under control, under guardianship.

So if that is your feeling, give him all the freedom you can. The more freedom, the better. He will misuse it, but in using it, he will find out that he is misusing it and will learn by his mistakes and progress and will become free. Our societies will become free in their social organization; which has a personality of its own and will be a self-governing form of organization, not a despotism, controlled by the wise, good and powerful, but a functioning grouping of human beings who in their collective personality want to do the right thing. Such a social organism may at times work exactly like the totalitarian organism because it may need to do things for its own preservation, which work exactly like the things that the totalitarian state does.

It will undoubtedly need some form of government, some form of laws, some form of control, just as individuals need some form of self-government, some form of self-discipline in their own lives. Those things are efficient means of accomplishing results. The totalitarian state uses them by compulsion from the top as efficient means of accomplishing the means which those on top desire. There is no reason why free men in a social organization should be denied the use of those means of accomplishing their own ends, providing it is their own ends towards which those means are directed, and provided their use represents the free will of the community.

No Game Without Rules

Hence, even in a free society, there are man-made laws—laws made for the purpose of order, for the purpose of seeing to it that abuse by one individual of his freedom does not infringe on the rights of other people to freedom. Traffic control means discipline enforcement, but we certainly, as free citizens in a free society, would be terribly upset if we did not have traffic control. The free country assumes discipline for a functional purpose and not for the purpose of exploitation. For the functional purpose is preservation to meet a crisis, and this is the test of a free democracy that has liberty. But when the crisis is over and the need has passed, those forms of restriction and discipline which had a temporary purpose should be laid aside, not frozen into the permanent organization of that society.

In such a society people can live and grow, and mankind can realize the possibility which Henry George envisaged. I think that when Henry George talked about freedom, he was merely talking about people, and he assumed that all of us would take that for granted. These man-made laws which serve the purpose of a free society are no good unless they accord with natural laws and Henry George devoted his



Robert Clancy of New York and Lidia Alkalay of Boston greeting conference delegates at the banquet (Dorothy Sara and Francis Goodale at left).
(Photo by Herb Lurio)

life to the search for that higher law, the natural law to which the human law and human effort must conform. He found that obedience to natural laws leads to the welfare of human society, particularly the Law of Justice. He left us this legacy, and I think he left us something more. That was the challenge to follow his example and to continue the search for truth.

He left us a great deal and it is a full task for thousands of people for several lifetimes at least to put into practice Single Tax or the Collection of Economic Rent or however you wish to refer to it. Just to do that is a work which we will probably never live to see accomplished, but that is not all. If we are not free, if we are prisoners of the thought that the ultimate truth has been handed down to us by Henry George, we have sacrificed some of our true liberty. I am sure Henry George would not have advocated such a sacrifice.

I do not believe that he ever would have thought that he had grasped the whole truth or had the ultimate solution of any problem. I think, however far as he went, he would have found that further horizons were opening up, challenging him to a further quest for truth. I think we must fix our minds on putting into law, or into acceptance by society, all that he gave us. I think we must go on further and not consider the answer complete, because if intellectual pride makes us fundamentalists, we will have lost something of the meaning of liberty.

Now our whole tendency of human intention is toward overhead controls, socialism and even for extreme forms of totalitarianism. That trend may change very suddenly. It is essential that we Georgists should keep the light burning and should be prepared. Our chance probably won't come twice. If it goes by it may not come again for a century. It is essential to be ready to take advantage of that turn in the tide and not be found wanting. And if it doesn't come in our lifetime, I think that we can still think of Matthew Arnold's exhortation: "Charge once more then, and be done! Let the victors when they come, when the forts of folly fall, find thy body by the wall."

What is the effect of what is called "taxation" on the price of land? There's a theory, suggested by John Z. White, which suggests that land can go up to one hundred per cent, and still you'll have a price on land. It's only a theory. Maybe it ought to be investigated.

—JOHN LAWRENCE MONROE