

FREEDOM AND "THE STATE"

By JOSEPH JESPERSEN (Flushing, N.Y. USA)

There is a view accepted by some Georgists, as expounded by Franz Oppenheimer in The State and Albert Jay Nock in Our Enemy the State - that "government", which is the economic body, is all good, while the "state", the political body, is all bad. In this view, government, resting upon consent, is concerned with justice and freedom, and its purposes are those of the people, while the state, using political means, is concerned with law and compulsion, and its purpose is to benefit the group in control. These concepts have some validity, but I submit that no nation now or in the past that we have any record of, fits either concept. Every nation has effected some compromise between the two, some with more freedom, some with less. Even the most totalitarian state must make some concessions. Russia has at least curbed land speculation.

How much freedom have we in the United States? In 1848 a group of Italian guardsmen were ordered to fire at a mob of protesting civilians. One refused. To escape court-martial, he ran away; he got out of Italy and came to the United States, 47 years old. He had considerable skill as an artist. Three years after coming he was engaged to paint the interior of the Capitol building in Washington. He spent 25 years doing that, then he was crippled by a fall from a scaffold in the dome and died soon after.

Millions of people have looked up into the dome of the Capitol at the allegorical figures painted by Constantine Brumidi. He said his sole ambition was "to make beautiful the Capitol of the one country on earth in which there is liberty." This state was not oppressive in the eyes of Brumidi who found more freedom here than in his own country. Many others over the centuries came to America seeking freedom.

Despite the encroachments of recent years, the USA still has a great measure of freedom. Whether we use the term "state" or "government", the job is to work for greater freedom.

The obstacle to freedom is not just the state. Emerson said: "The people don't want liberty, they want bread; and though republicanism would give them more bread after a year or two, it would not until then, and they want bread every day."

The Georgist philosophy is unique in offering both liberty and bread. The struggles of our movement were compared by Robert Clancy in his "I-You Chat" in IUN No.12 to a battle of an emerging island with the ocean. This reminded me of a quotation by Stefan Zweig in Erasmus of Rotterdam:

"An idea which does not take on material shape is not necessarily a conquered idea or a false idea; it may represent a need which, though its gratification be postponed, is and remains a need. Nay more, an ideal which because it has failed to secure embodiment in action is neither worn out nor compromised in any way, continues to work as a ferment in subsequent generations, urging them to the achievement of a higher morality."