

Reform and the Ballot Box

By Catharine Klock



“CONGRESS VOTE ON TRADE PACTS CRUCIAL.” Many newspapers today carry headlines such as this in reporting the efforts of different liberal groups to arouse the people of the United States to the importance of the coming Congressional debate on the renewal of American trade agreements. If Congress should refuse to renew these treaties, there will be little hope in other countries that the United States is seriously concerned with a lasting world peace.

We Georgeists know that the slow process of education is the only effective way of bringing about economic and social reforms, but today we are faced with an immediate economic danger of trade treaties and foreign policies which calls for quick action. Fortunately, we are not alone in our awareness of the present situation, and among liberal groups with which Georgeists might very well cooperate at this time is the League of Women Voters.

The League was founded about twenty years ago as an “unpartisan organization to promote responsible participation of women in government.”

Statesmen, political scientists, experts in civic administration, civil service commissioners and business executives, have given their encomiums for the work done by the League of Women Voters, but that is still not necessarily a criterion of value; it must be measured in its services, technique, and its approach to the issues of what a workable democracy achieves through the ballot box.

The League is contributing toward the functioning of democratic government because it considers before choosing action; makes its preparation, and then organizes in local communities to focus its membership upon the chosen action.

The important question to the League is whether it intends to be what it appears to its contemporaries; how to capitalize on its failures for later successes.

Miss Marguerite M. Wells, president of the National League, has said:

“After the war to make the world safe for democracy, people in America became acutely

conscious of defects in the functioning of American democracy. The fact that less than half the electorate voted in the majority of elections was somewhat superficially pointed out as the very essence of democracy’s failure. People jumped to the conclusion that if a large fraction of voters could be shamed, scolded, cajoled, or ballyhooped to the polls, the defects would be removed. The League jumped with the rest. It led the rest in its campaigns to get out the vote which became a feature of League activity everywhere, and those who were too young to remember them should be told that no bigger and better campaigns were ever conducted. But the vote was not materially increased.

“The League learned that the slacker vote was not a disease but a symptom. The disease was more obscure. It lay deep in American political life, its traditions and habits, even in the organization of its governmental system. There existed no sovereign magic cure such as an increased vote. The League never tried again to find one. It began to recognize that American people needed to be made acquainted with political affairs, to learn their dependence on them and how to deal with them effectively.”

The League early found that it was giving itself too big a program, and retrenched to an emphasis on a few basic issues with which it became thoroughly familiar. It is easy for the League to find its efforts diverted from its main purpose, and it has to constantly put a check rein on its activities, particularly in its aim not to become just another pressure group. The League desires basically to restore the habit of direct citizen participation in government—without the same object of the typical pressure group.

Fair play in all its activities is a symbol the League must constantly hold before itself. People of all political representations must be given their due consideration, and a reciprocal respect must be felt at all times.

The educational method has been their method of bringing about this individual responsibility. The League’s credo is “A default by Leadership is no more nor less than a default by the people

themselves." There is very little in their basic ideal with which Georgeists could quarrel, and there is much in their achievements which we must admire.

Speaking also as a member of the League, we are desperately concerned in awakening our members to the dangers of isolation and trade barriers. This, definitely, is of great concern to us and calls for all out cooperation. The broadsides and the literature on this subject are available, and can be distributed by any one without fear of political taint.

One particularly good questionnaire on "Am I an Isolationist?", would surely help to clarify this term for the average person. There are ten questions to which is required nothing less than a 100% grade to excuse one from this damning cognomen. Two questions will illustrate our stand: "We are fighting this war for only one reason—because Japan attacked us. Yes or no?" and "We are carrying 'friendliness' too far when we allow other countries to sell goods in the United States in competition with our own. Yes or no?" And the League's answer like the Georgeist, is, "No."

A broadside entitled "Isolationism Again" warns against the growing reactionary desire to return to "normalcy" just as we did in 1919. "If we are to escape this fate we must beware of Congressmen speaking soft words about America's responsibility after the war, while at the same time condemning every step toward international good feeling." The League gives several slants on what to observe in one's Congressman on this score. The League believes that any Congressional action that violates the principles of postwar planning for free access to raw material, and removal of excessive trade barriers, will definitely shake the confidence of the United Nations in our good intentions. "United States' policies cannot be divorced from the problem of world peace and, good or bad, whatever is done now will be the foundation on which we must build later. The issue will be confused by the old arguments about protecting the American Market and Standard of Living." Surely, these quotations from our educational material parallel those realists who want a world-wide free economy.

Another subject of current mutual interest to both the League and Georgeists is the bill introduced recently by Senator McKellar of Tennessee proposing "the most brazen patronage raid since the Civil Service act was passed sixty years ago." The League is definitely alert to the dangers of distracting Congress from its principal function of making laws at this time. As everyone knows this bill would be a rich addition to the political gravy bowl, and would cause an excess of Civil Service as well as patronage. The League is lay-

ing great stress on this among its members, and Georgeists would gain much by cooperating with the League.

The function of this organization is to simplify political problems to such a degree that it becomes possible to educate great numbers of people who will not or cannot take time to read and study by themselves. It would seem that, with the League's idealistic ambitions coupled with economic Georgeist knowledge, the two movements could work together toward a better world. Undoubtedly, greater progress could be attained by Georgeists cooperating with not only the League of Women Voters, but with other socially aware groups.

Imperial Sugar

A SOLDIER stationed in Puerto Rico writes: "Food is scarce outside the army. The people live mostly on rice and beans. But the rice is gone and beans are scarce. So they are living on cornmeal. Eggs, meat, butter, most other foods are not to be had on the outside. When food does come in, it is too high to buy."

This substantiates newspaper reports that the islanders are on the verge of starvation. It is a slap in the face of every American who continues stupidly enough to believe that a paternal government can do for him better than he can for himself.

The problem is not peculiar to Puerto Rico. U-boats sharpened the crisis, but did not make it. It reflects the growing want of the many in a world amazing for its increasing abundance.

Sugar dictates to Puerto Ricans. Sugar owns the fields. Sugar turns a deaf ear to the needs of the tillers, the reapers, the mill hands, the stevedores. Sugar claims for itself American backing, American skill and brains.

Sugar is imperious, self-willed. Sympathy? It offers not even a shred for the workers who raise Sugar to eminence. Sugar is cruel, rapacious.

Not a pretty picture, eh? A lush land, rich in its possibilities. A patient people, half slave, half free. Free now to starve. For the ships that carried the sugar now carry soldiers or lie riddled hulks at the bottom of the sea. Sugar for the nonce is unthroned. But still Sugar holds the fields—holds the land out of use!

Looming before the islanders is the spectre of Death By Starvation. Starvation! Say! have you seen the pictures, the bodies racked and twisted, all skin and bone, sights that leave you trembling, sick, mad clear through?

That's for Puerto Ricans. Our more than neighbors, our brothers, our fellow Americans.

Patriot, what will you and I do to help this tragic people? Shirk it? Or do we fight.

CLAYTON BAUER.