

Land and Freedom

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Comment and Reflection

WE commend to the attention of Mr. Green, head of the American Federation of Labor, the following from a pamphlet published in 1671, entitled "Reasons for Suppressing Stage Coaches." The argument is so much in line with Mr. Green's well-known convictions regarding machines and labor-saving devices that we are sure if he had been living at that time he would have heartily endorsed it, since, as is so admirably stated, the coming of the stage coach—an improved machine in effect—tended to decrease the demands for swords, pistols, holsters, portmanteaus, etc., and thus throw the makers of these things out of employment, or so Mr. Green would have argued in the curious topsy-turviness of his economics:

Most gentlemen, before they travelled in coaches, used to ride with swords, pistols, holsters, portmanteaus and hat cases, which in these coaches they have little or no use for; for, when they rode on horseback, they rode in one suit and carried another to wear when they came to their journey's end, or lay by the way; but in coaches a silk hat and an India gown, with sash, silk stockings and beaver hats, men ride in, and carry no other with them, because they escape the wet and dirt, which on horseback they cannot avoid; whereas in two or three journeys on horseback their clothes and hats were wont to be spoiled; which done, they were forced to have new ones very often, and that increased the consumption of the manufacturers and the employment of the manufacturers; which travelling in coaches doth in no way do.

ARMAMENTS, wars and rumors of wars can be traced in large part to economic maladjustments. But it is interesting to note that Prof. Salvador de Madariago in his recent book entitled "Disarmament," published by Coward-McCann of this city (an admirable treatment of the subject by the way) curiously but no less pertinently reverses the order of sequence and argues that armaments tend to encourage "Artificial Economic Systems by lending some plausibility to the theory that a nation must be self-supporting." The world is deterred "from pursuing its occupations in all peace of mind," and the Professor finely adds that "the realm of the human spirit is defaced by a permanent blot." There is no doubt that cause and effect act and react in the way the Professor describes.

THE *Southern Agriculturist* published in Nashville, Tenn., in a recent issue thus solemnly treats of "equality of opportunity"—not knowing of course what it means:

There is no such thing possible as equality of opportunity. In the first place, nobody knows what a good opportunity is, and no one can tell the difference between a good opportunity and a poor opportunity.

THEN to show that he does not know what he is talking about the editor proceeds. "It is impossible to standardize human beings." Even President Hoover would not be guilty of such confusion. Men and women are unequally endowed with genius and capacity, but they are handicapped by exterior influences and obstacles created by a system of privilege. So it often happens that they are out-distanced in the race by the immeasurably less endowed. As for the masses of men who are not exceptionally endowed, the so-called plain people, who are nevertheless quite capable of making a living and going through life as fairly prosperous men and women, find the earth shut against them. The great reservoir of the planet, all its choice spots have been preempted.

IN addition the great army of those who do the work of the world, who provide everything we call wealth, find that there is a subtle influence at work that drains their resources, levies continuous tribute upon their earnings, a tribute which goes in an endless stream into the pockets of those who as landlords or intermediaries, do nothing to create this wealth, but who are mere tribute takers. We are told that everybody works in this country. That is not true. Everybody is *busy*, but work in the economic sense is the making of wealth. Landlords and their underlings, real estate agents, collectors of rent, land speculators, are all as active as squirrels in a cage—with just as many futile revolutions—but they are not workers like house-builders, manufacturers, store-keepers and business men generally.

THERE is no "equality of opportunity," dear sapient editors of the *Southern Agriculturist*, where land is a medium of speculation, and where the enormous values that attach to it, and which are created by the presence of population and their private and public activities, go into private pockets. And real equality of opportunity can only come when our prevailing economic institutions are overthrown, and we establish a system in which the highly gifted Thomas Edison, John D. Rockefeller, John Jacob Astor and plain John Smith will secure their relative positions in a race that shall be fairly run.

PROF. RICHARD T. ELY now threatens to classify land as property in all succeeding instruction. This "threat" is contained in a communication to an inquirer in which the Professor says: "This will be brought out in the new edition of 'Outlines and Economics.'" To which we may retort that Prof. Ely may also if he wishes classify as capital the fructifying influences of the sun. But that will not make them so. This he will not do because they are not property and cannot be rented. But if they could be, the Ely school of economics would at once include them as capital and as something to be paid for to private individuals.

IN this same letter occurs the following:

"It seems to me that if you will reflect upon what you see about you you will find unearned increment everywhere, using the terms as they are ordinarily employed. The chance gains are especially significant items in the class of unearned increment. In fact, W. I. King thinks that these are the only unearned increments; it all depends on your definition."

We do not know this man King, but he too must be a genius in his way. Well-a-day! the only unearned increments are the chance gains, the winnings in the stock market, or on the race tracks, lotteries and gambling halls. If anything were needed to make the prevailing political economy utterly ridiculous Mr. King has added the finishing touch.

THE muddle that President Hoover and the legislators at Washington have got themselves into is illustrative of the topsy-turvyiness of prevailing economic theories. Reference is here had to the farm problem. The equalization fee has now been definitely abandoned in favor of the debenture plan, which provides that the exporters of staple farm products, wheat, cotton and other agricultural products which admittedly cannot be increased by the tariff, shall receive from the government debentures equivalent to half the protective duty on what they sell. These debentures will be accepted in payment of import duties, and the benefits of protection, which they now confess cannot be equalized as between agriculture and manufacturing, will at last be accorded to the farmer.

AND President Hoover, after his fine words against government going into business, now finds himself up to his neck in business. President Coolidge was more fortunate. He was able to get along without saying or doing much. Four years of "masterly inactivity" made the president a political recluse. President Hoover is not so lucky. Although Hoover, no more than Coolidge, has not as yet identified himself with any constructive policy, he will find, now that he has definitely rejected the debenture plan (and even before this copy of LAND AND FREEDOM reaches its readers may have vetoed it), he must announce himself in favor of some plan of farm relief. The

inevitable cannot be staved off any longer. In adopting any plan he will antagonize elements in and out of his party.

IT is useless to appeal to President Hoover with any intelligent plan. He is an able engineer, but he has already revealed a white background on which nothing is written relating to government. On that white space he has yet to trace a single clear-cut conviction, a single apprehension of anything fundamental. He is "internationally minded," we are told. If this refers to his sympathies we have no reason to question it. But one may travel to and fro on the earth without at all divining the relations of peoples to one another. He sees the world divided into sections by tariff barriers, as if there were hostile interests among peoples who reach out to exchange their products with one another. He does not see in our unrestricted private property in land a conflict between the privileged and unprivileged interests that is inevitable. President Hoover does not divine the origin of this struggle. He accepts it all as part of the order of things. No man can be internationally minded and not be aware of something at least that lies beneath this endless conflict between the oppressed and the system that oppresses them.

JUST as political economy today concerns itself with what is termed economics and includes business management, agriculture, mining, and a variety of unrelated subjects, wholly ignoring the problem of the distribution of wealth and the laws that govern it, so sociology has passed into discussions of "behaviorism"—the new fad—and the treatment of fractional problems and narrow specializations. There is little social thinking because none of those who are immersed in these detached and fractional speculations have any social theory at all. The plight they find themselves in, and of which they are of course wholly unconscious, is due to the abandonment of any theory of laws determining production and distribution.

NEITHER in the teachings of political economy nor in that of sociology are there any broad generalizations. Generalizations require hard thinking to formulate and much hard thinking to defend. Nor can we look for broad generalizations in an atmosphere where fractional problems seem alone to count. Nor can we hope for such generalizations where authority is cited to rebuke the student or professor who is tempted into unbeaten paths. And all this suffocating influence will account for piecemeal thinking and fractional speculations.

HOW can one discuss intelligently the problems of unemployment, business depression, tariffs, et al without a knowledge of and reference to certain fundamental natural laws? How discuss in any rational way

the problems of unemployment without references to man's relation to the earth, the natural resources from which all sustenance must be drawn? How attempt to determine the causes of bad times without a knowledge of what is property and the consequences of the legal treatment of things we call property? How discuss monopoly without some conception of the natural laws of society, the apprehension that somewhere distribution is interfered with, that monopoly must originate in obstructions to freedom?

WE are more and more reconciled to the great disparity in wages between college professors and bricklayers. But let us be perfectly fair and add that, in view of the experience of our friends Walter Fairchild and Chas. LeBaron Goeller, there are shining exceptions among professors of economics. It is impossible to speak in terms of unqualified disrespect of a class of teachers that includes such men as Prof. John Dewey, Prof. Harry Gunnison Brown, Prof. F. W. Roman, and others who might be named, and to recall these names may well soften the asperities which are provoked by the attitude of so many of the professors of economics.

A Professor's View

IF a man saves and improves his property, he must pay more taxes. If he is lazy and thriftless his taxes remain low. If, constructing a great factory, he increases the efficiency of hundreds of thousands of workmen and so adds to the sum of commodities which all may enjoy, he is punished by increased taxes.

But if, instead, he keeps a piece of land vacant and unused until the activities around him and the growth and development of the community have given it high value; if he then makes money out of what these others have done, requiring the person who would use the land to pay him a high price for advantages of situation for which not his activities but the activities of others are responsible: we keep his taxes low.

And this we do notwithstanding the fact that such holding of land out of use amounts to a public nuisance. For, because of it, gas pipes, electric light and telephone wires must be extended farther, street railway lines must run longer distances, retail store delivery service must cover larger area, and pedestrians must walk longer distances to and from their work; yet the holding of land out of use for speculative gains tends to make land dearer rather than cheaper, so that the individual householder may have somewhat less garden space than otherwise.

—PROF. HARRY GUNNISON BROWN, Department of Economics, University of Missouri.

International Conference July 29 at Edinburgh

THE draft of the program for the Fourth International Conference to Promote Land Value Taxation and Free Trade to be held at Edinburgh, Scotland, in the week commencing July 29th has been completed by the committee of which Mr. Ashley Mitchell of Great Britain is chairman. The opening of the session will not begin until Monday afternoon, July 29th, when Bailie Peter Burt, Chairman of the Arrangements Committee, will formally welcome the Conference to Scotland. There will be, it is stated, a social gathering on the preceding Saturday evening, and an informal program on Sunday for the early arrivals. The formal address of President Charles O'Connor Hennessy of New York will follow the address of Chairman Burt, and this will be followed by short speeches from representatives of various countries represented.

The following days will be taken up chiefly by discussions relative to various formal addresses which have been prepared on such subjects as "Free Trade in Its Fullness;" "World Competition and World Markets;" "Foreign Exchanges and International Trade;" "Economic Rent—The Dividing Line Between Common and Private Property;" "Land Valuation—Methods and Results." This latter subject will be a symposium of papers from Denmark, the United States, Australia, Hungary, and other countries. Discussion on these papers will, incidentally, deal with the question of whether selling value or annual economic rent should be the basis of taxes. Other papers will cover aspects of the land question in various countries under such titles as "Public Lands in German Communities;" "The Expropriation and Subdivision of Great Estates in Eastern Europe;" "The Victory of Georgeism in Denmark;" "Typical Objections Met and Answered."

A review of the progress of land value taxation in the United States since the publication of "Progress and Poverty" fifty years ago is to be undertaken by John J. Murphy of New York. One of the most humanly interesting and significant papers will be prepared by Chester C. Platt, dealing with the land boom in Florida and its social and economic effects, with incidental references to the curious taxation system by which Florida represses the growth of business and industry.

One of the desirable features of the Conference that the Arrangements Committee has provided is the printing in advance of all formal papers, which will not be read through at the Conference, but will be summarized in brief talks by their authors. The widest latitude will then be allowed for inquiry and discussion.

The local committees have provided various entertainments and sightseeing trips for the visitors, and on the evening of Tuesday, July 31st, there will be a social gathering for the celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Publication of "Progress and Poverty," at which a special