

# Land and Freedom

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## Current Comment

IT is of interest to record that Oliver McKnight states that he is informed through a correspondent that the late Democratic candidate for the presidency, John W. Davis, years ago gave a copy of *Progress and Poverty* to Arthur Hoopes, saying, "Arthur, here is a book you ought to read and I want you to give me your opinion of it." The reading of the book made Mr. Hoopes a Single Taxer. It would be interesting to learn from Mr. Hoopes, who is well known to Pennsylvania Single Taxers, whether the reading of the book produced any reaction in the mind of Mr. Davis himself.

WE are more than skeptical these days when it is whispered, sotto voce, "The Hon. Mr. So-and-so is a Single Taxer." It used to be said that President Wilson had a well-thumbed copy of *Progress and Poverty* on his desk. There was a long list of public men who it was stated had been converted to our doctrines. But as they remain quiet ever after this is not of the slightest importance. For it remains true that a Single Taxer is one who does something for the Single Tax. That John W. Davis would be a tower of strength to the movement no one will dispute. But we are not going to rejoice prematurely if it appear that he ended his work by making Mr. Hoopes a Single Taxer—however desirable an acquisition to the ranks that gentleman unquestionably is.

IN an address made in Philadelphia Mr. Davis touched on the question of taxation as follows:

And yet, uninviting as it may be, there is no subject in all the realm of politics that approaches it in importance; there are no questions that involve so much of human liberty, of governmental continuity, and of the principles of free institutions, as those which gather round the question of taxation. . . . There is no definition of human liberty from which you can omit the right of the individual to do as he will with his own. There is no freedom where men are not permitted to enjoy the fruits of their own labors; and there is no despotism equal to that which arbitrarily and without necessity subtracts from a man's accumulations what he is unwilling to surrender. When the government seeks to take from the citizen any portion of that which he owns, the sum of his rights and liberties is engaged in the justice of that subtraction. . . . That is the Democratic theory of government: that revenue may be collected solely for the support of the government, not to give privilege or advantage to any man, nor to confiscate the property of any man.

Mr. McKnight wrote Mr. Davis saying that only the candidates of the Commonwealth Land party had any right to use such language, and Mr. Davis replied: "Please allow me to thank you for your very interesting letter. I am deeply grateful for your appreciation of the speeches I made. I tried to state our principles simply and clearly and letters like yours lead me to believe that I have succeeded. In the addresses which I propose to make in the future I think you will find that I have made clear my position on the very important question you raise."

REV. Dr. S. Parkes Cadman delivers at the Y. M. C. A. in Brooklyn a sermon which is radioed every Sunday. At the conclusion he answers questions sent to him in writing. These questions cover every department of knowledge. The Doctor is very ready and his answers are clever. Sometimes they seem like clever evasions. What shall we say to this?

"Would the adoption of Henry George's philosophy, known as the 'Single Tax,' abolish the cause of most of our economic troubles?"

"There is no doubt that agrarianism does lie at the root of considerable difficulty. Although the changes have been very great in the agrarian situation in England, unemployment runs around a million at the present hour. I am inclined to pin my faith, as did Mr. George, upon no single remedy for this complex stage of economic difficulty."

Dr. Cadman knows, or should know, that the so-called agrarian question is only a part of the great economic problem for which the Henry George plan offers a solution. Included in the problem are the values of mines and forests and the incomparably greater values of city lots, the question of the return to labor and capital, the world-perplexing problem of the distribution of wealth. Dr. Cadman should try once more to answer the question propounded, and not do it too suddenly. For there is something suspicious of the sciolist in these "rapid fire" answers to questions with which Dr. Cadman regales the listening multitudes on Sunday afternoons.

CARL C. PLEHN is a professor of economics. He was once president of the American Economic Association. Yet if one should assume that because of this he knows anything about the subject of which he is a teacher that assumption needs to be revised. In a recent article in *The Nation's Business* he says, speaking of the tendency of voters to support any extravagance involving the expenditure of public money: "Here the explanation is

not far to seek, for it is safe to say that the taxpayers are greatly outnumbered at the polls by those who pay no taxes." Any school boy could have told the professor that everybody except the thief and the beggar pays taxes, that those who never see the tax collector pay most of the public revenue, city, state and national, and that the real taxpayers are the masses who do the labor of the world and vastly outnumber the other kind who go to the polls—those who do not labor and are therefore not taxpayers but taxgatherers.

**P**RESIDENT COOLIDGE in addressing the Association of Real Estate Boards which met in Washington, said: "You are in a very literal sense the sellers of America. You have sold it so well that it is recognized as the best buy in the world."

There lie in France the bodies of more than fifty thousand boys who died for this America that is being bought and sold. Few of them probably ever stopped to reflect that the land they fought for was an object of barter, that men were making money by dealing in parcels of this land for the security of which they were offering their young lives on the altar of sacrifice. How grim is the irony of it! Future and more enlightened generations will comment on the speech of the President as a curiosity of history. "Sellers of America, indeed!"—the land of the free and the home of the brave at so much per front foot! Hasn't the President any imagination?

**A** VALUED correspondent writes us that we are unjust to re-elected governor Donahey, of Ohio, in permitting our correspondent in that state to term him "incompetent." He defends the governor by saying: "Donahey is modest; he knows his limitations; he made no platform speeches during the campaign, and yet, although the Republicans swept the state with 700,000 majority, he was re-elected by nearly 150,000. There must be something to the man. His campaign was marked by the absence of money and bunk; the Democratic state organization is weak; it was not very friendly to him. Several Democratic county organizations were almost openly hostile. In this state the governor is cruelly hampered by the laws and system if he really wishes to conduct the state's business efficiently. But there has been an absence of scandals; he has shown commonsense in the conduct of affairs and humaneness in the treatment of prisoners. He vetoed 76 bills, and reading these veto messages I have been struck by their commonsense. As governors go, Donahey is pretty good." If we have done an injustice to the governor, as apparently we have, we apologize.

**I**N a speech delivered by Mr. La Follette in Brooklyn during the campaign that gentleman, with his usual recklessness of assertion, spoke as follows:

As long ago as 1908, according to John Moody, the greatest living authority on corporations, there were ten thousand trusts in the country, with a capitalization of \$31,000,000,000. Each of these trusts is a criminal trust.

It may be of interest to readers of *LAND AND FREEDOM* to know that Mr. Moody took occasion at that time to point out that the trusts he enumerated could be divided into two classes: those that had some sort of special privilege (ownership of natural resources, tariff advantage, patent monopoly) and those that did not have such advantages. And Mr. Moody further pointed out, that only those which had some such privilege could permanently charge the public more than actual competitive costs, and that all other trusts would either have to sell as cheaply as small competitors or go out of business. The history of the trusts formed during the craze twenty years ago has fully justified Mr. Moody's prediction. In none of the subsequent utterances of Mr. La Follette was there any recognition of the fundamental economic distinction between mere aggregations of capital and capital plus privilege.

## The Passing of the La Follette Movement

**I**T needs little political acumen to predict the collapse of a party which has as its candidate for President a Republican (La Follette) and for Vice-President a Democrat (Wheeler) leading the Socialist Party and others of many persuasions (including a variety of unattached voters and Single Taxers whose philosophy is that of the natural order if they be really followers of Henry George) on a platform which is neither Republican, Democratic, nor Socialistic!

Perhaps there are analogies to this in the realm of comic opera. A Swift, a Samuel Butler, a Gilbert or an Anstey alone could do it justice but it has no place in practical politics. It is true that this Gilbertian party appears to have polled four million votes, but that would make no difference save to the undiscerning to whom mere numbers are curiously appealing symbols even when they stand for nothing. If it were ten million it would mean but little more.

Third parties have accomplished much in American politics. But only when they stood for some definite principle. The La Follette party stood for a lot of things—no two things alike. There was nowhere a cohesive principle. It was not even audible for the thing it was suspected of—government-owned railroads. It had no tariff policy, no land policy, no taxation policy, matters which are the elementary household affairs of government.

It was just a party against the two old parties! But why a third party? What mysterious healing forces for the ills of a nation lie in merely multiplying its political agencies—making them three instead of two? It is true