

Land and Freedom

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Comment and Reflection

UNHAPPY is the nation without a vision, the Scriptures tell us in somewhat different language. But also most unhappy is the individual who knows no cause worth fighting for. He may live a life that is not without its pleasures, but these do not penetrate to the depth of his being. They stir him only intermittently and are far from being a continuous experience.

HOW different is the happiness of the man who, embracing some great principle, enlists in the war for its establishment. First there is the intellectual joy in its discovery and recognition. Then follows the burning enthusiasm that animates the believer. Christianity supplied such a cause; the convert to its message experienced a delight almost ecstatic. All down through the ages other causes, other great movements, have given to individuals a happiness transcending all the emotional and intellectual experiences of those who live humdrum lives and pursue their small and superficial pleasures.

THERE is no intellectual experience comparable to tracking a great principle to its lair, so to speak. Discoverers and inventors are aware of this. Einstein is perhaps one of the happiest of men. But how much more intensified is this experience when the principle clearly seen is one that concerns the whole human race, its future happiness and contentment, even its actual continuance upon earth. The delight is then something more than intellectual; it is emotional, moral, spiritual. It raises the man who espouses it to heights which only sages and saints surmount.

PERHAPS they may not avoid a spirit of self-consciousness. A little contempt for the stupidity of mankind may creep in, a little impatience with its slow mental and moral processes. But they will learn humility from experience. They will need to humble themselves before the spirit of love and tenderness in recognition of their own limitations; men are not greatly different anywhere. God has made us very much alike in those qualities that link Hodge with Galileo, Socrates to the Man with the Hoe. Man and mind take generations in the making. What any individual may grow upward to or descend into is a miracle concealed in the slow processes of the ages and all the influences they comprehend.

IT is a great responsibility, therefore, that rests upon those we call Henry George men. They have been vouchsafed a vision and a truth the most important ever revealed to man in civilized society. Because of this they need to humble themselves before the great truth they have espoused. We think most of us feel this humility, though the temptation to exalt ourselves is strong. We should be content with our happiness and let that suffice. We are wiser for the moment than those who have not yet seen the truth, but we are no better equipped mentally. We are more fortunate, that is all.

THE suggestion of a federal tax of 1 per cent on land values offered by the committee from the Henry George Congress at Baltimore to President Hoover received considerable publicity. Many comments were favorable, and those that were not originated in the usual misconceptions of the proposal. The *New York Evening Post* said that approximately \$1,000,000,000 would thus be added to agriculture's tax burden, according to farm leaders.

THESE "farm leaders" are not named, and it would be interesting to know who they are. If they said anything of the kind they are unfitted to be farm leaders or leaders of any kind. For with the amount of revenue that would be raised by such a tax calculated at even \$1,600,000,000, one wonders what has become of the value of city lots, mines, timber lands and power sites. The statement is so preposterous that it is difficult to see how any farm leader could have said it or any reputable newspaper quote it as authentic.

YEARS ago there was a bill submitted in the New York Legislature providing for a permissive tax on land values for localities. A Senator from one of the agricultural counties of the State, one of those farm leaders whom the farmers may well pray to be delivered from, objected that the proponents of the bill wanted to throw all taxation on the farmer. An advocate of the measure countered with this: "Senator, this bill proposes to tax land according to its value. There is a lot in the city I come from, at the corner of Broad and Wall Streets, that I can spit across and it is worth more than your whole damned county."

ARE these "farm leaders" willing to leave hundreds of millions of city lands untaxed while farmers are crushed to the earth by grievous tax burdens, with the re-

sult that in little more than one hundred years we have passed from a condition where farmers were almost wholly independent, owning their own homes, to one of 50 per cent tenant farmers, with three-fourths of the remainder staggering under mortgaged farms? It is easy to retort that land is already heavily taxed. But it is an axiom that the selling price of land is an untaxed value, so that these millions on millions of dollars of selling price of city lands are so much unearned income flowing into the pockets of those who as landlords do nothing for it in return.

TO the kind of "farm leaders" who seem not to know what land is, or in what land values consist, a little elementary knowledge on the subject would do no harm. Perhaps no class of producers stand to benefit from the public appropriation of ground rent and the abolition of all taxation quite so much as our farming population. The farmer's economic rent as compared with that of other land owners is almost negligible. The bare land value of a farm is what is left after subtracting the value of buildings, fruit trees, growing crops, tools, machinery, and even fertility so far as the latter is the result of the farmer's fertilization and supervision. Indeed, as the Single Tax would take no more than the economic rent, what would remain after the eliminations named would in many cases be practically nothing.

WHY the present system of taxation is peculiarly hard on the farmer is that he cannot escape it—he cannot escape even part of it. It is inexorable in its minutæ. Dwellings, barns, outhouses, cattle cannot be hidden—to almost the last penny they get on assessors' books. The farmer's income tax, if he has any, is out of his earnings, unlike the income taxes of some individuals and some corporations, which do include a small part of economic rent. Nor can the farmer shift his taxes as some others do. The price at which he must sell his products is fixed for him by prevailing world prices. And what he buys—his tools and his machinery, his building materials, his clothing, his plows and his reapers—is increased in price by the protected monopolists who have the ears of legislators at Washington. And he is paying taxes on land which, in many instances, he bought or whose value was fixed at inflated prices. He is the victim of the land speculation which his "farm leader" friends would by their foolish policy perpetuate for his descendants through all succeeding generations.

WE call the attention of these same "farm leaders" to the article by Abel Brink on another page, in which he tells us what is happening in Denmark. There the farmers are more fortunate in having farm leaders who know. They are not afraid of the tax on economic rent. The farmers, or "housemen," are the backbone of the Single Tax movement in Denmark. The name of Henry George means something to them. The farmers have precisely

the same handicaps that burden the American farmer; but with an intelligence that the farmer here might emulate to his material advantage they welcome reductions in taxes accompanied by increases in the public collection of the economic rent. To a somewhat lesser degree this is true of the Western Canadian provinces, where a slow increase in the rural economic rent going to the government meets with no opposition from the working farmers. And with these facts before them we ask these "farm leaders" frankly, if impertinently, Whom are you working for—the farmer or the land speculator?

A Lost Opportunity

THE intimation by Mr. Chamberlain in the House of Commons on Tuesday that the valuation of land is to be suspended, the temporary staff dismissed and the necessary legislation included in next year's finance bill is a carrying out of Mr. Baldwin's public pledge that the land value taxes "would never see daylight."

The Prime Minister, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, is author of the following statement:

"Rent is a toll, not a payment for service. By it social values are transferred from social pools into private pockets, and it becomes the means of vast economic exploitation."

The now Lord Snowden in 1919 said:

"Until they had abolished landlordism root and branch every other attempt at reform was building on the sands. Every social reform increased the economic rent of land."

The poorest class in the community are robbed of comforts and of nourishment by a cut in the dole; civil servants, soldiers and sailors and teachers have their salaries and wages reduced, and the class who "toil not, neither do they spin," who live off rental exactions, are not by the British Government to be called upon to pay a penny in the pound tax on the capital value of their land, though these land owners draw millions in ground rent and escape paying on these rents local rates.

All that has happened is a justification of the *Irish Weekly's* criticism and policy: that the last Labor Government ought to have enforced self valuation by owners within three months and collected the tax on that valuation within a year.—*Irish Weekly*, Belfast, Ireland.

Wheel Tax

IF the proposed wheel tax could be levied upon some of the wheels in the heads of its proponents, it might work to considerable advantage both to the motorist and the community in general.—*Los Angeles Times-Mirror*.

WHERE are we going? We are going exactly where Henry George told the world fifty years ago it was going, and where the followers of Henry George have been telling it ever since that it was going.—*Auckland Liberator*.