

Land and Freedom

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Same old ball.

Comment and Reflection

IT seems to require a great emergency to awaken us to our mistakes. When things appear to be running smoothly, we are not disposed to take an inventory of our behavior. Now, however, we are engaged in a war testing us more decisively than anything we have ever before been through, and a multitude of past sins is coming to light. And while the day of battle is not ordinarily the time to select for "We told you so"—yet, in a spirit of constructive criticism and for future guidance, it is only fair to remind ourselves that had we paid more heed to fundamental principles we might not have been placed in our present predicament.

IF, for instance, we had observed some truths in regard to trading, we might not today be engaged in a desperate scrap collection drive. Not long ago we were content to drain this country of its metals and other vital materials and to seek gold in exchange. The yellow metal now lies buried in practically forgotten vaults while we are hunting in closets and cellars for odd bits of steel and copper. "O barren gain and bitter loss!" is now our meed, while reflecting to what use our scrap metal and high octane gasoline are being put by our former customers, the international gangsters. We were supposed to be enjoying a "favorable balance of trade." What we were really doing is best described by Henry George in his "Protection or Free Trade": "Protective tariffs are as much applications of force as are blockading squadrons, and their object is the same—to prevent trade. The difference between the two is that blockading squadrons are a means whereby nations seek to prevent their enemies from trading; protective tariffs are a means whereby nations attempt to prevent their own people from trading. What protection teaches us, is to do to ourselves in time of peace what enemies seek to do to us in time of war."

OUR present predicament springs from something more basic than a misguided policy of selling scrap to the enemy. It includes other untoward acts, all based on fundamental misconceptions. We were led astray by mercantilist doctrines, by a rationalization of things as they are, by an invitation to "bask in the sunshine of the brief day." The preachments we heeded have turned out to be the mouthings of false

prophets. There is of course no sense in crying over spilt milk; but there is sense in becoming aware of our sins and, after a well-deserved penalty, in resolving to do better next time.

PERHAPS it is over-zealous optimism to hope that we are now ready for the lesson. We are not unmindful that this sort of thing has happened before. On the other hand, there are hopeful signs of an awakening. The world conflict has almost forced us into a more sensible trading policy. North and South American relations have been steadily improving. Not long ago the Canadian-United States Joint War Production Committees called for removal of all economic barriers between their respective countries. The United Nations are now pledged to a pooling of their resources and matériel. In ~~paradoxically~~ paradoxically, we are recognizing the advantages of friendly trading. It would be a great step forward if we could conceive of free trade as a general peacetime policy, instead of a temporary wartime expedient, imperfectly applied.

IN other ways this war is forcing us to correct some of our misconceptions. The importance of *production* is being impressed upon us to an unparalleled degree. It was not long ago that a policy of scarcity was reasoned out and adopted. But tragic necessity has now evoked a logic of its own. Would it be too much to expect a little of that logic from our post-war leaders? Is it possible for them to conceive the goal of a productive economy? Another problem now clamoring for attention is that of the distribution of wealth. It is being met in the only way that seems to be known at present—by bureaucratic planning, frozen prices, etc. But at least we are realizing that the question is here to be solved and will no longer brook postponement.

BUT it is not enough to meet the problems created by our misdeeds with "emergency" measures. Sooner or later we must come down to a sane economic program based on the fundamentals of freedom and equality. If we fail in this, if we persist in the old ways after the war, we can only look forward to another terrible convulsion. But if we observe and apply the simple laws of economics, then of a surety we can have an earth at peace.