

# Land and Freedom

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## Comment and Reflection

IT is astonishing how rapidly under certain provocative conditions men sink to a slave mentality. This attitude of mind so easily to cultivate is evidenced in the sympathy with which all sorts of pension schemes, public and private, are regarded. Why should any one be pensioned? Why should we expect newspapers, business firms, governments, to establish pension schemes for workers? If real wages have been paid there is no obligation on the part of employers, nor indeed of governments, to assume obligations of this kind to be discharged in the future. That such provisions are looked upon as matters of course and seem justified in the minds of the workers are evidences of a slave mentality.

A GREAT metropolitan newspaper has recently announced a modification of its pension system affecting those who have served it for a lengthy period. This pension allowance is to be paid only in the event of a year's illness preceding it. This move of the publishers is regarded with indignation and loud-voiced complaint, as if something were owed by the publishers to their employees. There are many similar instances which will occur to the reader. If all pensions, public and private, were abolished, we would be nearer an understanding of what should constitute the only compensation for service. The total sum set aside for the payment of pensions must be enormous.

THE government has set the example of course. Its first set-up in the payment of a public wage rate in excess of private wages and salaries has been an encouragement to this sort of thing. The private citizen, generally speaking, is paid less for the same service but is in most cases supposed to provide for illness and old age out of his current wages. The public servant, on the other hand, gets a higher rate of pay for the same service with a pension to boot when his limit of service is reached. It is an age of "gimme." And nobody appears to be ashamed of it. Its abridgement, as in the case of the metropolitan newspaper we have cited, is looked upon as an outrage.

THOSE who know what wages are, and who know that when they are paid the mutual obligation ex-

isting between employer and employed is finally and fairly discharged, will realize that the slave mentality which has been growing up out of our economic system, and as a consequence of it, will disappear among free men. No man owes anything to another save for actual service rendered, and pensions, public or private, are an unconscious confession of the injustice of the system under which we live.

IT is the age of the out-stretched palm—of a mendicant mentality. Those who in manlier times would have resented alms-giving eagerly demand it and are hurt if they do not receive it. Those great lines of Smollet which Burns said he would have given much to have written:

"Thy spirit, Independence, let me share,  
Lord of the lion heart and eagle eye,"

no longer appeal. Do we not sneer at "rugged individualism," conceiving in some strange way that rugged individualism means riding rough shod over the other fellow instead of that sturdy self-respect which, conscious of the rights of others regards no one as his master, and few as his superiors. It has taken years of man's divorcement from the land to destroy that and bring about the subtle change from the man of early America to the man he is today.

POVERTY does more than deprive man of actual comforts. If that were all it would not matter so much. But it destroys something more precious than animal needs. It eats into the mind and soul; it deadens self-respect; weakens independence of thought; saps intellectual integrity and courage. Man cannot long bend beneath an enforced dependence to a master, personal or impersonal, and expect to retain his manhood. He will soon come to talk the language of his masters, think their thoughts, feel as they feel. For man must live, and he seeks to gratify his desires with the least exertion. To those who have the gift of employment, which is the gift of life or death, he must bow the knee. Is it any wonder that he soon comes to think the thought of his masters, talking as they talk, thinking as they think, hating as they hate, even worshiping as they worship, and finally dwarfing his immortal soul to the need of propitiating his masters by subordinating himself in word and deed to the tawdry pattern of their conven-

tionality. And finally the condition of a mendicant mentality fit only for a dictatorship, and the death of democracy!

**T**HERE can be no objection to any group of workers, labor unions or others, establishing old age pensions, life insurance, or pensions in cases of sickness or disability. That is something which concerns them alone. Our criticism is directed against that attitude of mind which looks to the employer as under any moral obligation to pay any kind of pension to the employees. This is purely a gratuity and should be so regarded. It tends to confuse the nature of wages and obscures the character of contract between employers and employed. How much of even voluntary insurance schemes would seem necessary or advisable when the community value of land is publicly absorbed and ready at hand to provide for emergencies, is a matter of conjecture.

**T**HAT will change everything. Pensions from this source would assume the character of public obligation. Employers owe nothing to their workers save their wages and fair treatment. The trouble is that economic conditions being what they are destroy all true perspective. The habit of regarding capital as the payer of wages, and the consequent subordination of labor to capital under present conditions, seems to justify these gratuities. They seem to justify government pensions, bonuses, benefactions out of private fortunes, and all the multitude of crazy notions that seem further to accentuate the unnatural dependence of the workers, who are really justified in demanding only one thing—freedom of access to the natural resources of the earth!

**T**ARIFFS conduce to the same habit of subserviency. But in a civilization such as ours it is idle to talk as Hoover does of "rugged individualism." Have the workers not been persuaded that they need protection? They have been taught for several generations that they are not able to take care of themselves, and it ill becomes a spokesman for the party of protection to talk of rugged individualism or individualism of any other kind.

**A**FTER several generations of "infant industries" Americans are still infants. It is impossible to imagine a more helpless population. Apparently we are at the mercy of every other people. Once it was England, then it was Germany, now it is Japan. We are subjected to the competition of these malevolent powers. We have faced the depression in the same spirit. Regarding it as a natural calamity, we have turned, not to our own resources, and our own resolution to overcome it, but to government.

**I**T is the same habit of our ancestors who prayed to the sun, against drought or for more abundant harvests.

And the belief that some miraculous powers were lodged in government is the outgrowth of this spirit of dependence. Man is impressed with the sense of his own helplessness. He is being destroyed by the systems, political and economic, which he has created.

**T**HERE was a time when Americans stood erect. Perhaps, almost certainly, this brave attitude of mind was an unconscious reflex of the knowledge that there were great frontiers which beckoned them, the easy access to this land and the right to work that was open to them. With the gradual closing of these frontiers, they were easy victims of a mendicant political economy in which they were taught that they must be helped by government. They still cherished the stupidity voiced in many Fourth of July orations of the "dignity of labor," about which they prated and to which conditions everywhere visible opposed a blank denial.

**J**APAN wants more room, which means more land. Hence the danger of war. We are told by Prof. Jesse Holmes of Swarthmore College that Japan is "terribly overcrowded, terribly poor." But who is crowding her? There is no question that any country, Japan included, with equality of land distribution, is able to support its existing population. Japan is in the position of being out-distanced in the business of land gambling—"a belated bandit," Prof. Holmes calls her. But if nobody were crowding her she would not be giving the impression of being overcrowded, and that is true of every country. Landowners are doing the crowding. Prof. Holmes calls all nations "bandits," which is a pretty accurate description, though he does not quite sense the reason for it all.

**T**HE curious misunderstanding about "overcrowded" nations is very persistent, despite the fact that it has no basis in fact or arithmetic. Even Frank H. Simonds, who has done some clear thinking on international questions, says that the way to avoid war would be for the nations rich in natural resources to divide up in order to live in peace in a normal world. He sees that it is hunger for land that causes war. He is not very clear about it. He does not see that what is the matter with "overcrowded nations" is that land owners are doing the crowding. If a nation has not enough of the things it needs it can share in the natural resources of the world by letting down the barriers to freedom of exchange.

**I**NTERNATIONAL wars and civil wars alike—most of them—have their basis in land or tariffs. They are shooting down peasants in Spain, of whom there are some three million, because the promise of agrarian reforms were not kept. The peasants who were shot down were called "anarchists"—a convenient term. Men who protest against conditions will always be called anarchists