

Land and Freedom

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Comment and Reflection

EMIL LUDWIG, one of the biographers and essayists of the new school who turn out literary products as a factory turns out quick-selling commodities, denies that the Dollar is America's god, and says, "All Americans work." He sees all Americans busy and concludes, in that happy, careless fashion of his, that all are working.

IT is true that no people are so busy as the people of the United States. They may be doing nothing save running around in circles, but they are in a constant feverish state of excitement which Mr. Ludwig mistakes for "work." They may be doing nothing save speculating on the exchanges, selling real estate, buying or exchanging automobiles, entertaining, getting up social functions, receiving and exchanging social calls—all busy, it is true enough, but doing nothing to add to the world's store of wealth.

WE need to remember the real meaning of "work." Work means the production of wealth. It is no exaggeration to say that one quarter of the people in this country who are so desperately busy produce no wealth at all. This is true of the great majority of those engaged in the real estate business; it is true of the young salesmen in stock and bond houses; it is true of more than half of the lawyers; more than half of the politicians; and many other classes who could be named. They do not work at all, in the sense that work is the production of wealth. They do not conserve the production of wealth; they perform no useful service.

SOME of the occupations of these classes, swollen far beyond their due proportions, have their limited field of usefulness. A stenographer, who works for a bookmaker who takes bets on the races, is not idle, but she cannot be said to "work," for what she is doing adds no more to the sum total of wealth than does the layer of odds who pays her at the end of the week. The chauffeur who drives the car of the landlord who derives his income from the land values that other people create does nothing more to increase the wealth of the world than does his employer.

OUR treatment of land as private property stands the whole economic structure on its apex to the degree that certain functions are magnified out of all true proportions, certain other functions suffer dislocations, and instead of the energies of the people being bent to the production of wealth, we witness vast numbers engaged in occupations the aim of which is to divert to their own pockets the wealth already produced. And it is because this diversion is at once more easy and more profitable than actual production that so many shrewd and intelligent men work at it. And superficial thinkers like Herr Ludwig, seeing how busy they are, think that we are a nation of "workers."

IT is curious, the misunderstandings that surround the word "work." Here is a story of a hold-up in Brooklyn reported in the papers. Two slick young bandits enter a store and line up the occupants against the wall. They are forced to yield up their money and valuables. One of them is asked what he does for a living, and replies that he keeps a little tailoring and clothes-pressing establishment across the street. The sixty-five dollars in his possession are immediately transferred to the pockets of the bandits. Two others confess that they are clerks in other parts of the town. The few dollars taken from them are handed back, the bandits explaining that they do not want to take anything from those who "work for a living."

NOW our suspicions are that these young bandits were not bandits at all, but some sort of political economists, or social researchers who pursue their occupations under the guise of hold-up men. For to no other than muddled students of political economy, or labor unionists who think of workers only as those who work for wages, would it occur that the man who runs a tailoring establishment does not work for a living. Robin Hood, Claude Duval, and Jesse James were accustomed to rob the rich and give to the poor, but they did not know of any such fine politico-economic distinctions as these young Brooklyn bandits. Hence our suspicions that they were not what they pretended to be.

WE have but little to add to what we said in our last issue regarding the changing attitude of Socialism