

Land and Freedom

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Comment and Reflection

IT is unfortunate perhaps that the President's proposal for Supreme Court changes shifts general interest from the economic aspects of Mr. Roosevelt's programme to a subject that is almost exclusively governmental. It is easy to see, or should be to the thoughtful, that political democracy rests upon economic equality. In the mass of experiments emanating from the booby hatch of the administration there comes the need of so modifying the fundamentals of our government as to make possible their imposition at the hands of a dictatorial power. It follows as the day follows the night. And it does not matter one bit that the ends sought by this experimentation seek to remove abuses of which we as a people are quite conscious.

WE are among those who believe that the founding fathers fashioned wisely. There is not an evil in our economic life that cannot be remedied by the orderly processes that have been duly provided. These may seem a little slow at times, but all orderly processes are slow. Mr. Roosevelt, however, is in a desperate hurry. He has cause to be in a hurry, since what he aims at is a revolution, a change of government so remorseless as to call for a new set up of labor and capital, new relations of government to industry, a condition in which all men are wards of the state. He does not openly avow this, it is true. He may not, probably is not, conscious of all this. He is being hurried along by forces he is largely powerless to control.

THERE is but one alternative to democracy, and that is dictatorship, either communistic or fascist in character. The only choice is between freedom and dictatorship. For the want of a little elementary knowledge we are loosing our grasp on democracy and subtly changing the character of our government.

THE evils that the administration contends against are not to be remedied by experimentation, regimentation, laws governing wages and obstructions to the natural flow of capital, but by freedom. What do we mean by freedom? Here is a nation practically illimitable in natural resources. Here are idle men barred from access to these resources.

Timidly and hesitantly this great fact is ignored.

Lincoln saw it, Thomas Jefferson saw it. So too did Tolstoy, Carlyle, Herbert Spencer. Above all Henry George saw it and worked out a plan for its orderly solution.

IN the face of what is so obvious Plans and Planners come and go. But all are on their way out. It is the nature of error to play a very subordinate part in this great drama, so the Townsend Plan, the Douglass Credit scheme, the Technocrats, figure in their one night engagements and disappear. But as Mr. Connor D. Ross has said in his work on "The Sphere of Individualism, "Truth has all the time there is." The eternal years of God are hers. And in its majestic march the knights of error clash against its impenetrable steel and soon cease to be.

THE attractive figure of the President with his persuasive personality is traveling fast into the limbo of forgotten things. His star now hastens to its setting. And all because he has failed to recognize the obvious. That obvious thing is man's relation to the earth, the necessity of freeing the natural resources so that Labor may be free to apply itself to the land. "A plan like this will be worked out some day," said Lincoln, sensing with prophetic insight the advent of the man who worked it out. "And it will be opposed by the senseless enemies of mankind everywhere," he added, for he knew men as few in history have known them. Had Mr. Roosevelt realized that production, not restriction, brings prosperity his whole programme would have been reversed.

THERE are those who seem perplexed and disheartened at what appears to be the slow progress of the Henry George movement. They assign a multitude of reasons, none of which are valid, such as the supposed inadequacy of the name Single Tax, the errors of Ricardo's law of Rent from which Mr. George deduced the Law of Wages—his chief great discovery—supposed discrepancies in "Progress and Poverty," and many other causes.

AS a matter of fact the progress of the cause has not been slow. Henry George departed this life forty years ago. No man has left so marked an impress upon succeeding generations. No American has so influenced legislation in his own and foreign lands. There is hardly

a city in the United States that has not in operation reforms in tax administration which owe their adoption to forces set in motion by Henry George or his followers, separation of land and improvements, tax maps, and modification of century-old abuses in assessments. Improvements in our election machinery are to be traced directly to him in the adoption of what was called by Henry George a generation and more ago, "The Australian Ballot System." The habit of assessors to appraise vacant land at a lower rate than improved land—at one time universal—is well on its way out. These reforms are all tagged with the name of Henry George. No man has influenced progress in anything like the same measure.

OF this, the clever young men who are writing today are in blissful ignorance. Most of them are more or less under the spell of Karl Marx. This is true of the Roosevelt administration with its patchwork planning which may be likened to a child's game of blocks. The scattered pieces are presumed to fit in somewhere and the children are having a fine time. But government is not like that. It is not a game of piecing together the scattered blocks in grooves where they fit. It is a human problem where men and women act voluntarily in accordance with their interests and desires and involuntarily in accordance with the natural laws of association.

IT is not to be expected that the planners will understand this. There is something eternally fascinating in the attempts to remake the facts of life, to reconstruct the relations of land, capital and labor in obedience to fanciful theories of social rebuilding more nearly to the heart's desire. Men enamoured of their subtleties write learned books in which these simplicities are lost in mere wordiness.

IT matters not to these writers if instead of repairing the leaks they destroy what is good and sound in the vain attempt to remodel the edifice, as if men and women were pawns or puppets to be moved artificially across the stage and set in their proper relation with the state as the chief Prompter.

THE trend is both silly and tragic. It is tragic when in the process of trying to make it work it lodged a poor little tailor, Jacob Maged, in a felon's cell for pressing a suit of clothes for 35 cents instead of 40 cents; that it ruined the garage business of Harry Sly because he would not pay an unjust fine, that it bankrupted the Schechters because it took their all to defend themselves from unjust and iniquitous charges, more political than legal. The legislation that made all this possible, along with crop reduction, the plowing down of cotton and the killing of little pigs, was handed to the legislators, not prepared by them. And because they cannot continue this crazy carnival of queer experiments the Supreme

Court is to be shorn of its power. There is no other reason for the action. All other justifications are hokum. The powers in control do not care a penny whether the Supreme Court justices are incapacitated or senile at seventy—the politicians are economically senile, most of them, long before that.

THE planners are not the people—they are a little group in Washington who use the people as pawns in their planning. Deluded by a spurious humanitarianism the people look with growing unconcern on the constant drain of wealth from overburdened tax payers to meet these various forms of "hand outs" which have become so necessary, but under which slave-mindedness has grown and initiative on the part of the masses, either in thinking or acting, is in danger of being permanently lost.

HUMANITY is not a tabula rasa on which is to be written new rules ranging from juvenilia to senilia for its governance. But the thurmaturgists at Washington proceed with their experimentation and give us glimpses like that of Kubla Khan of vanishing pillars and fountains that fade away.

THE story is told of a German scientist who was writing a natural history. When he came to describe a camel he was at a loss; he had never seen a camel and he evolved one out of his own brain. Whether the animal bore any resemblance to the natural camel the story does not say.

IN much the same way the Planners draw upon their imaginations for their pattern of mankind. But man is an animal subject to laws that were here before the Planners arrived. Among these laws are those which relate man to the land and are known as the laws of political economy. It is a subject easily mastered. There is the same ideal exactness and perfection in economic reasoning that pertains to mathematics, which is one of the few forms of purely demonstrative reasoning.

WE append the following letter received from Rev. John Haynes Holmes, and addressed to Benjamin W. Burger:

Thanks for your letter received this morning. I was delighted to see your article on Henry George in the current issue of *Unity*. I have already sent a copy of this issue to an old Single Tax friend of mine living in New Jersey, as I knew how much interested he would be in your statement. I think the article is admirable in every way, but I am still a little stubborn in feeling that Single Tax and Socialism these days are not so much antithetical as complementary. The Single Tax handles the land question, and therefore I am for it; Socialism handles the machine question, and therefore I am for that. Why not put the two things together?

NO one has a higher regard for Mr. Holmes than the editor of LAND AND FREEDOM. But we nevertheless disagree with him and do not think that he has thought through on the matter of land and machinery. Every machine is drawn from the land, and this is elementary. If labor is free to apply itself to land, machines can be multiplied many fold. The man who owns machinery cannot make it pay without placing it in the hands of labor to cooperate with it. He cannot hold it idle and expect to reap a return. He cannot charge more for its use than his competitor demands—he is forced to a reasonable demand by others owning like machinery. And with labor free to apply itself to natural resources, machinery or capital must pay the wages demanded in a free market. This cannot be less than what the laborer could earn if he owned the machinery. All the owner of capital can extract from production is that part of the product which is interest upon his capital. He cannot take any part of the wages of his employes—the bidding of capital for the labor of those who work for wages will determine that automatically.

“WHY not put the two things together?” Mr. Holmes asks naively. That is, the Single Tax which concerns itself with the land, and socialism which concerns itself with machinery. The answer is because there is no limit to the production of machinery which comes from land and because its ownership is not a monopoly. A man may hold his machinery idle. But it rots, while land is perpetual. Land yields gold fish and locomotives, and it does both by the same process—the application of labor to it. And because on land and from land all products are brought forth, because a needle and a Mergenthaler machine are capital, and capital must have the cooperation of human labor, there is no way by which socialism can “handle it”—to use Mr. Holmes’ curious phrase. He confuses the natural and normal relations, in which capital is the servant of labor and in the absence of labor, or lacking its cooperation, the most helpless thing in the world. In a society where labor is not conscripted under compulsion, as it is where land is privately controlled, capital takes its proper place as associate of labor in the work of production. But this is true only where land is free.

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IN short, the American people have failed to see the essential injustice of private property in land, because as yet they have not felt its full effects. This public domain—the vast extent of land yet to be reduced to private possession, the enormous common to which the faces of the energetic were always turned, has been the great fact that, since the days when the first settlements began to fringe the Atlantic Coast, has formed our national character and colored our national thought.

—PROGRESS AND POVERTY.

Causerie

BY THOMAS N. ASHTON

THE STATE OF THE UNION

AND the President “shall from time to time give to the Congress information of the state of the Union.” But the President is very busy this morning, so we’ll give him a hand at this most simple task. Anybody can inform the Congress of the state of the Union by simply picking up the morning’s issue of any metropolitan daily, consequently your reporter is exceedingly well posted on the aforesaid state of the aftermentioned Union. He read it in this morning’s paper.

What this country needs, sez the President himself on page 1, column 4, is new “wage and hour” legislation and six more Supreme Court Justices.

What this country needs, sez the Carnegie-Illinois Steel Corporation on page 1, column 5, is more wages and shorter hours for labor.

What this country needs, sez the Committee on Industrial Organization (alias Mr. Lewis) is to let us “organize” the nation.

What this country needs, sez “scientific correspondent” Crowther of the *Manchester Guardian*, to Harvard University, is a class of “philosophic journalists . . . like Ben Franklin and H. G. Wells.”

What this country needs, sez Professor Ekblaw of Clark University, on the next page, column 6, is “consumer cooperatives” where there haint no “profit motive.” The six thousand souls of Mora, Sweden, haint paid no taxes “for 60 years because of its flourishing lumber industry.”

What this country needs, sez the good people of Joliet, Ill., 5 columns over, is a good, old-fashioned, nickle schooner of suds.

What this country needs, sez the Federal Trade Commission, next page, column 2, is “production credit associations” and low-rate credit.

What this country needs, sez Basil Mathews, British author and lecturer, to the cultured crania in Gardner Auditorium, Boston, is a “group of politically-conscious voters.” Well, we’ve had plenty of unconscious-politicians and captains of industry.

What this country needs, sez an army of educators from the “best schools” of the East, to the Massachusetts legislature, is the repeal of the teachers-oath-of-allegiance law.

The morning metropolitan paper thinks that is about all that this country needs today, outside of the customary grocery order, but we think that what this country needs is about one hundred million padded cells—a straight-jacket sleeping garment in each cell—a radio out of reach above each cot, governed by remote control which sends forth hourly lectures (one hour out for lunch) 365 days