

Land and Freedom

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Comment and Reflection

“IT is a sad reflection that this land should have come to such a pass that willing hands are idle; but alas! the worst is not yet. As machinery advances to greater perfection there must, of necessity, come about a state of affairs where fewer and fewer workers are needed to produce more wealth, or goods. And as women invade industry there must come about a lowering of wages as well as fewer places for men. The balance of increased wealth must needs find its way into the hands of a few favored individuals, so, as anyone may see, the general tendency is toward more unemployment until the world wakes up to the sad truth. For help we cannot look to professional politicians. In them is no hope. So long as their physical comfort is untouched they will not stir a hand. With them the interests of capital are primary; of men, entirely secondary. Our political problems, as you see, hinge on money problems alone and we have lost sight of men and their needs.”

THUS Charles J. Finger in his *All's Well*, an interesting magazine he edits. As Mr. Finger is reputed to be a Single Taxer, on some evidence not yet produced, it is well to put this before our readers as relieving him of any such suspicion.

No machine ever threw any man out of employment. Every machine feeds other machines and starts the wheels going in many directions. The tendency of machines is to raise wages; to increase purchasing power by lowering cost of production; to stimulate inventive ability and widen its field of usefulness to humanity; to multiply the number of products, putting more and more wealth within easier reach of the masses of the people. The consumer finds his effective demand increased by reduction in price. What is saved from his purchases goes to make further demands on the higher-priced products of labor and raises the standard of living.

OF the printing business Mr. Finger knows something. Did the linotype throw any printers out of employment? Did the locomotive, chief among modern inventions, decrease the demand for labor? Or the automobile? Was it a dreadful thing when the sewing machine replaced the hand needle? In the hand-needle age was the condition of the sewing woman so enviable? Not if we accept the undoubtedly true picture of conditions among this type of workers versed by Thomas Hood in “The Song of the Shirt.”

MR. FINGER is the true descendant of those who rioted in Lancashire when Arkwright introduced his spinning jenny. For even if he is law-abiding and would not riot, his thinking, and that of men who think as he does, is the same as that of those who rose against the machine in the cotton-goods manufacturing districts of England during the last century.

WHAT is it that so deceives men who talk of the “machine age”? Undoubtedly it lies in appearances. If a machine is invented that does the work of two men where one sufficed before, is it not obvious that one man is thrown out of employment? Superficial observers might think that way, but not the reflecting men. For as this process has been going on for several centuries, it should be obvious that most of us would have been out of employment before this depression set in—not ten millions in this country but nearer forty millions idle!

WHAT deceives Mr. Finger is not that machines seem to be throwing men out of employment, but that behind this unreal appearance something else goes on which many have not the wit to see. For as machines turn out their products the gain is absorbed by the earth-owners in increased rent. Little is left after rent is abstracted from the total wealth produced, and nothing or little remains to labor to buy back its products. This causes the phenomenon which short-sighted economists call “overproduction.” Rent is the “machine” that works relentlessly, undoing the natural processes of distribution.

THERE is no more limit to the production of machines than there is to any other labor product. They all come from the earth. And this is true of the larger as well as the smaller machines. A machine is not a self-created, greedily consuming automaton! Labor is needed both to create and maintain it. Normally and naturally it places vastly increased satisfactions within the reach of the masses.

IN a society where wealth is concentrated, machines as well as other products of labor tend to ownership in fewer and fewer hands. Denied the power to freely produce machines, or any other form of wealth, labor finds that the owner of the machine, as well as the owner of other forms of capital, commands the service of labor

almost at his own price. What curious perversion of reasoning it is that turns from the real enemy of labor to attack with angry epithet the machine which is its servant!

THE machine is not a Frankenstein that labor creates that it may be devoured. It is the hands and arms and visible brain of labor. It is not necessary for government to assume ownership and control to secure the widespread diffusion of its benefits. Under free conditions where gains from the machines are not absorbed by the insatiate growth of land values—economic rent—the tremendous increase in production calls for commensurate exchange of other products made by other machines, each in turn. How, Mr. Finger, can anything produced by labor, which can be multiplied infinitely, injure the interest of the producer? A machine, as has been said, is a labor product. How can a labor product hold a menace for the man who creates it?

WE fancy the reply will be that some machines require large sums of money to produce them, and that labor has at its command no such amounts of capital. If this is the thought, let the objector reflect on the natural law of cooperation. As labor is the producer of all capital—the wealth that is used in the making of more wealth—it is clear that with natural resources free to labor, machines would soon be generally owned, not under government supervision but under the operation of natural laws of production and distribution. It should be remembered that we are living today under artificial restrictions in which opportunities for employment are almost entirely restricted. It was assumed that Mr. Finger knew this.

WITH a Free Earth, with every restriction to the use of natural resources swept away, capital would soon change owners under the rapid differences that would appear. For those who under present conditions control the natural resources of the earth must control the capital. Capital not based upon earth ownership, or equivalent monopoly, is at a marked disadvantage. This is what deceives the Socialist. He is misled by appearances. He has forgotten his Karl Marx, who told us in his "Das Kapital" that the ownership of natural resources was at the basis of the exploitation of labor. His mistake is the same as that of Mr. Finger, who thinks, rather preposterously, that labor can fashion anything in the shape of a labor product for his own destruction.

THIS needs to be considered by Mr. Finger and those who think with him. Machinery and invention, even under present conditions, offer boundless opportunities for labor. But Rent, actual and anticipatory, moves fast, though not always fast enough to absorb all the gains of Wages and Interest to real capital. Usually a step in advance, Rent at other times may lag a little behind. If

the gain from a machine is 3, rent quickly takes 2, and eventually the whole. Then follows the break in "effective demand," labor cannot buy back its product, and the machine, which is labor's hands and arms, stands idle along with the idle laborer. For a short time it seems to the superficial observer that the capital in control of the machine has profited inordinately, but a closer observation shows rent rising ever higher, absorbing the gains of capital and leaving to the "employer" of labor a lot of rusting iron!

THE *New York Times* is a staid newspaper, staid almost to the point of solemnity. Yet if one having no knowledge of fundamentals rushes in to discuss the prevailing depression and remedies therefor, he is almost bound to be funny in a solemn way. H. L. Puxley is one of its financial writers. He is not yet sufficiently well known to have his name go thundering down the ages, or even as far as the back street. But he has great resourcefulness that may yet win him fame. He suggests as a means of bettering conditions a national raffle in which every citizen is to be given a free ticket, and in which prizes to the amount of \$250,000,000 in Federal Reserve notes would be issued to those holding the lucky numbers! And this is urged in all seriousness.

MR. PUXLEY makes other suggestions which he naively admits are "highly controversial" and require to be "argued out," but are here advanced for consideration rather than "dogmatic demands for action." For this we should be grateful. A Grand National Sweepstakes to End Depression would add to the joy of nation. A picture arises in our mind of Mr. Hoover blindfolded—for we would trust no less responsible an individual—drawing the winning tickets from their receptacle! Commenting once more on the rather original suggestion of Mr. Puxley, we want to instance it as one among the many examples of what we have termed "the breaking down of the contemporary mind."

SPEAKING of cures for the depression not long ago Rudy Vallee paid a visit to President Hoover. The President, probably remembering the old saying of some great man—was it Fletcher of Saltoun?—that "he cannot who made the laws of a country if he were permitted to write its songs," asked Rudy if he could write a song that would dispel the present depression. A friend of ours, having in mind the simplicity of Mr. Hoover's character, insists that our worthy President said this in seriousness. But we are skeptical.

WE are not convinced that the philosophy of Spinoza offers a complete explanation of the phenomena of being, but it is the nearest to perfection in its endeavor to answer ever attempted by the mind of man. Setting