

# Land and Freedom

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## Comment and Reflection

**I**N a recent address in Brooklyn, William Allen White said:

"To President Coolidge, the business of the United States government is business. To Lincoln it was political unity and freedom; to Roosevelt, justice, and to Wilson, peace on earth.

"President Coolidge is the typical political leader of the new era in which prosperity is the chief end of mankind."

**W**HAT is the business of government? Preferably, what is the *purpose* of government, for the less business government has to do the better for both government and business. Thomas Jefferson has said, "That government is best which governs least." But this leaves something to be said for governmental ideals. Constitutions and statutes are valuable only as they recognize human rights, and seek to conserve them. Although some persons affect to see a distinction between human rights and property rights there is no such distinction. Property rights are also something to be conserved and safeguarded in the interests of human rights.

**F**OR after all the right of property is a human right in a very real sense. Henry George has spoken of the "sacred right" of property. The essential ownership of a man to himself connotes an indefeasible ownership in what he produces. It is his, as Henry George says, "against the world." There is therefore no distinction between human rights and property rights. And if government keeps one right clearly in view it cannot fail to serve the other.

**H**ERE, we had almost said, the "business" of government ends. It has nothing to do with the morals of the people save as the act of an individual or group of individuals violates the rights of others. It has nothing to do with industry, which is a matter private to the citizen, providing again its operations do not involve the invasion of human rights by reason of some fundamental maladjustment of the laws themselves, or through act of violence or deliberate fraud. Even in the last, government should proceed with the utmost deliberation since the term "fraud" is an elastic one.

**M**UCH of the apparent justification for the enormous mass of government activity is the denial in our

laws of that primary right which is at once a human and a property right—the right of a man to the use of the earth. We say a property right, since the private collection of the rent of land is a denial of the true property right of others who should share in this common fund. Taxation of private property, rendered necessary by the failure to collect the rent of land, is another gross violation of human and property rights. Tariff obstacles to free interchange of products is a third violation of human and property rights.

**G**OVERNMENTS can do little to conserve prosperity. They can aid prosperity by keeping their hands off. But official meddling has never made a people prosperous and no government has ever yet helped in creating prosperity. Government intercession has always, and of necessity, been confined to the highly organized industries whose voices are more audible to legislative ears. Such aid as government vouchsafes is not for the weak and unorganized, and of the truth of this statement the agricultural industry of the country can bear witness. Always it is to the more sturdy beggars that the eleemosynary aids of government are extended.

**I**T never occurs to government functionaries that there is such a thing as a natural law of production and exchange. It never occurs to them that capital flows naturally into the most profitable channels, that the play of individual forces, of needs and desires, determines the direction of industry, and that when the field is free, and no artificial obstacles exist, prosperity is a permanent condition of industry. No government has ever understood this—for every government functionary thinks it his duty to do something rather than to *undo* something. He finds government a fearful tangle of problems, of legislation overlapping and conflicting, of interests whose calls for help and more help deafen and bewilder him. Most of these legislators go insane or talk drivel. Some become involved in schemes of legislative corruption for which the system rather than they are to blame, for conscience is blunted where reason is not dethroned.

**C**OOLEDGE is the product of his time. No one is more perfectly in harmony with the thought of his period. He should be reelected and probably will be. In fact, he should be our perpetual president until the pendulum of the country's aspirations swings again in the opposite

direction, and the conscience of men awakes. Prosperity is his god, though what shall it profit a nation if it gain the whole world and lose its own soul? William Allen White has touched the secret of Coolidge's limitations as well as the source of his popularity, though perhaps he just misses the point. For before enduring prosperity can come, justice must come, and the Freedom he links with Lincoln's name, and the peace on earth of Wilson's ideal will follow, for these are the obedient handmaidens of Justice and harbingers of a world's prosperity.

**I**N a review of "The Meaning of a Liberal Education," by Everett Dean Martin in the *New York Times Book Review* of Jan. 9, the reviewer quotes Mr. Martin as saying: "We often hear Single Taxers, Socialists, patriotic societies or vegetarians, speak of their propaganda as education." Mr. Martin then goes on to say: "The propagandist is interested in what people think; the educator in how they think." "The propagandist wishes the people to close their minds and act."

**W**E wonder if Mr. Martin is influenced by the evil reputation which has—without justification—overtaken the word "propaganda." It is another instance of the tyranny that mere words—or rather temporary interpretations of them—exercise upon human thought. It has led Mr. Martin to a very doubtful definition of what constitutes true education in the following: "The educator strives for the open mind. He is willing to reconsider, to hold his conclusions tentatively. The result for which he strives is a type of student who will not jump at the propagandist's hasty conclusions or be taken in by his catch words."

**P**RESUMABLY the propagandist is one who advocates what he conceives to be the truth. If now and then his zeal overreaches his discretion, that is the fault of the individual. And we might inquire of Mr. Martin if an "open mind" is to be sought for (and inculcated) in the student, why he should close his mind by assuming that the conclusions of the propagandist are "hasty" and their argumentative weapons "catch words." Mr. Martin would have his student maintain an "open mind," but we are afraid that he is urging him to close his mind to any form of appeal to which the term "propaganda," slovenly used and indiscriminately applied, can be affixed.

**W**E are quite sure that neither the Single Taxers nor the Socialists, with whom Single Taxers differ diametrically, want people to close their minds and act. Mr. Martin has never heard anything that would lead him to such a conclusion. Both schools come with arguments, which are an appeal to reason, and both schools are confident that if the student keeps an open mind he will embrace the doctrine—that is the honest conviction of both.

**T**HE fact is, Mr. Martin's plea is an appeal for a kind of education which we suspect is the reverse of the ideal he cherishes. It is a wholly unconscious appeal, this plea for an "open mind" that will deliberately close itself against the conclusions of propaganda. What Mr. Martin is contending for is not an open mind but a vacant one. This is precisely the defect of modern education. He seems to be advocating a kind of mind that will act as a sieve which, admitting all ideas, will let them out again. The distinction he makes between education and propaganda recalls the old distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, orthodoxy being my doxy and heterodoxy the other fellow's doxy.

**T**OO many of our educated and college bred men and women have learned no principles they can apply to questions and teachings and problems as they arise. There are to them no natural laws that govern the relations of men, and no moral laws that enter into our consideration of great social problems; hence their attitude toward life; their view is cynical or amusedly tolerant. This is not the fault of the student; it is decisively and emphatically the fault of modern education.

## Again, the Prohibition "Red Herring"

**F**OR more than twenty years the great financial interests that are united in support of an economic system which plunders the wealth producers of a large percentage of their product, backed by their contributions the agitation for national prohibition of the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. In some cases the advocacy of prohibitory laws was doubtless sincere, as for instance John D. Rockefeller's, who doesn't drink intoxicants and thinks other people shouldn't. In general, however, the motive of the financial aid that carried on the dry propaganda was the making of "the liquor question" the chief issue in politics, to the end that really important social and economic problems, for which a solution was urgently desired, might be sidetracked and kept out of sight.

How well these tactics worked our readers know. Laying aside any considerations of the wisdom of prohibitory legislation, and the possibility of its enforcement, there was a question of personal liberties, and individual rights, that might have been expected to revive the sturdy American principle that citizens should not be compelled by law to refrain from doing something that, even if in many cases injurious to themselves, was purely a matter of their own private concern. The appeal on these grounds was faintly made by those opposing prohibition, and received little attention in the press; practically the only means of reaching the many millions of voters. Actuated by greed, many of the leading newspapers refused to publish anything in the nature of anti-prohibition arguments unless they were