

Land and Freedom

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Comment and Reflection

WE have been called to task by some of our subscribers for a lack of sympathy with the New Deal. They do not ask us to endorse the acts of the administration, but beg us to regard with a more sympathetic attitude the policies now in operation at Washington, because these acts and policies are undertaken in a humanitarian spirit and by men who are kindly disposed, and who have the welfare of the people at heart. It may be said that autocracies and dictatorships have always begun in this way. The gloved hand preceded the mailed fist. The initial pretence was always to provide for the wellbeing of the people. The claim is not that the people be granted *freedom to do things for themselves* but that those higher up—the government in short—*do something for them*.

IT is for this reason that we do not care a hoot how well meaning are the New Dealers, or how many things they do for the people, or how tremendously vituperative they become. They have yet to assail even the outposts of privilege. Who own the earth own us. This great wrong cannot be overthrown by taking from some and giving to others, by silly regimentation, by reducing acreage, or plowing under cotton, or killing little pigs. In the face of all that is being done we are asked to refrain from harsh criticism. Are they not trying to do something for the people, we are asked.

WE shall try to be polite. Cardinal Newman said it was a mark of good breeding to be merciful to the absurd. But it is mighty difficult at times. It is precisely because these strange policies are not only absurd but are fraught with grave dangers that the Henry George men of the nation should raise their voices with a unanimous shout of disapproval.

BUT when all is said that can be said against the New Deal we cannot accept as an alternative policy tariffs and subsidies which the Old Deal offers us. As yet there is no sign in political life of any prominent leader standing for an unfettered industry. The Republican party is traditionally hobbled by its protectionist tradi-

tions. It cannot break away from the body of death which binds it to outworn shibboleths. It seems quite impossible that it can blaze a new pathway. Yet until it does the New Deal with all its preposterous experimentation has the field to itself.

SO far no one in political life seems willing or able to take up the cudgels for the true doctrine of unfettered competition? Is no one equal to the task? Even those who look with distrust upon the New Deal and its spending orgy seem hopelessly confused. Professor McBain of Columbia who is a critic of the New Deal, nevertheless has this to say: "I think the traditional American system shows that it is no longer capable of self-operation to the satisfaction of a sufficiently large portion of the people of the country." He gave it as his opinion that business, as now organized, will never again absorb enough of the unemployed."

IS it necessary to say that "as organized" it never has? The unemployed we have always with us, in the best of times from one to three millions. Why? Because men are shut out from the opportunities for employment. In new countries with vast tracts of land unappropriated there are no unemployed. This constant attempt to discuss the problem without reference to the factors in the problem is the besetting sin of the professorial mind. It has filled the world with a perfect Babel of incoherence. If these professors would only see that the problem is one of the relation of labor to land, of the willing hands to the natural resources of the earth, they would save themselves a world of trouble, and their readers a lot of perplexity in the vain effort to understand them, any one of them we may say, for they all differ, thus proving that ninety-nine per cent of them must be wrong.

THERE are a very few factors in the problem. The professors inject many more. Here are men at work on a problem in which the solution is absurdly simple if the real factors are considered. Along come a group of experimentors who lug in each his imaginary factor, one or more. The problem is thus rendered increasingly intricate and complicated. But if ninety per cent of the remaining factors are thrown out of the window, the whole sum of the problem is laid bare. It is not merely

a problem in economics, it is a problem in ratiocination by which if we consider only the necessary or active factors we have the correct answer. The confusion arises from the introduction of factors that do not belong.

BUT the professors like them. It lends a semblance of great profundity. It enables them to pick flaws in the speculations of their brother professors. The infinite refinements of their theorizing add to their stature, immeasurably increasing their importance. If they ever see that it is not so complicated as all that, they thrust the suggestion aside. It looks profound to them and so it must be. Chesterton has hit it off well:

"Oh, we have learned to peer and pore
On tortuous problems from our youth;
We know all labyrinthian lore,
We are the Three Wise Men of yore,
And we know all things but the truth."

IT is frequently a matter of surprise that the average thinking that goes on seems to take so little account of laws and principles. From which we are prone to argue that what is needed is more knowledge, and, what concerns us most, more knowledge of economics. In the main, this of course is true. But the conclusion needs some qualification. For many of those from whom we get some of the most astounding results in thinking have studied economics and are familiar with Adam Smith, McCulloch, Perry, Tausig and others from whom, even if in broken lights, we get some economic principles. With these opinions and teachings Lippman, Moley and Tugwell, even Roosevelt himself, are not unfamiliar. Some of them even profess to know Henry George.

THERE must be some other explanation why these presumably informed persons fail to "think through." This explanation that should be forthcoming must also account for a similar failure on the part of mass thinking. We have a certain body of knowledge, volumes of statistics, results of intensive study and research, and a thousand ingenious speculations. Some thinking must accompany the exercise that has resulted in this vast material. But conclusions that hang together seem to be wholly lacking. Nothing enduring has come from it; only syntheses in which any agreement seems pitifully small.

THERE are premises which if granted lead up to rational summarizing. There are prodigious arrays of facts, but we look in vain for anything save now and then a few significant hints. There are writers like Lippman, Stuart Chase, and contributors to the *Nation* and the *New Republic* who toy with problems and leave us dangling in the air. They are sure of nothing; they retrace their steps continuously and seem to take all sides at once. They attack communism, socialism,

Douglassism, Townsendism, but not being themselves fundamental these attacks seem distressingly futile. They have no real social philosophy on which they can fall back, no solid ground for their feet. •

THE explanation is this: Thought is for the most part Two Dimensional. But there is a Third Dimension. Real thought must be Three Dimensional. Within the first two speculation may run rampant; conclusions from observed facts are left to the vagaries of imagination and are the prey of personal preference and education and predilection. There may be correct diagnosis, and keen minds working in the first two dimensions may arrive at correct conclusions and true remedies and solutions. But usually by accident, and always with the risks of possible loss, or the entrance of fallacies that vitiate conclusions. Such minds working in the first two dimensions have done much useful work in the world of thought but they are not among the great thinkers, save only as they have contributed to the conclusions of others.

IT is the workers in the Third Dimension, only those indeed, who do the real thinking. In the Third Dimension are Laws and Principles without which no philosophy of Life, or Religion, or Economics can be enduring. Facts, statistics, all knowledge, are of use only as they derive their strength from Laws and Principles. Workers in the Third Dimension judge the passing panorama not by any temporary standards, but by codes of ethical value which have eternal validity.

POLITICAL Economy is a body of such laws—all in the Third Dimension, but not on that account difficult to understand. Instinctively we recognize them in the order in which they make their appearance. First: Facts, Second: Conclusions. But in the Third Dimension we come up with Laws and Principles. If Principles and Laws do not support the conclusions we must abandon the facts and reconstruct the conclusions.

ONE of the characteristics of writers on economics of the present day is their talkativeness. With such small bases of principles to guide them they possess amazing fluency. Talk is cheap and we have more of it where opinions are many and unsound. Some of it is entirely incomprehensible, as for example much of Mr. Tugwell's "speculations." Those who contend that language is a device to conceal thought will find here abundant confirmation. There is more to talk about. Variety of opinions and confusion of opinions lead to a strange and unusual verbosity. This is at the basis of the charge against Henry George men that they are people of one idea. It is a familiar reproach of those who because they have many opinions and few fundamental

principles find it incumbent upon them to spread their language so lavishly. Their paucity of laws and principles are the explanation of their plethora of words.

"Somethin's Gotta be Done"

IT was the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and twenty-eight. The GREAT and HONORABLE General Court (House of Representatives to you) of Massachusetts was deep in the depths of profound meditation. It was sorely perplexed. Taxation—the ever present problem—was receiving special attention at this particular session. Special attention was being given and the Commonwealth's most prominent personage, in the field of legal experts on common and statutory law concerned with taxation, had persuaded the House and Senate leaders that "somethin's gotta be done" in regard to the menacing growth of the taxation muddle.

Emerging from the inner sanctum of the inner sanctoria, the legislative representatives solemnly informed the House and Senate that "somethin's gotta be done" to get at the bottom of the hopeless mess of tax laws. The sober and solemn members of the sober and solemn legislature nodded their heads in wisely profound significance and agreed, one with another, that "somethin's gotta be done."

So somethin' was done.

The very prominent personage who, though not a member of the GREAT and HONORABLE General Court, knew all the answers in legal terminology on common and statute law, was appointed chairman of a body of illustrious representatives and senators whose duty it was to hold a summer session and to find THE solution to all this annoying mess which had resulted from an accumulation of necessary tax laws.

The summer came and went. The harvest moon shone down upon the frazzled State of the Pilgrim fathers. The day for the filing of legislative reports arrived. Ah! Relief at last; relief from the eternal question of multiple taxes and tax laws! The special session experts had explicated; the legal luminary leader of the special session was ready to report. With precision and detail he set forth the multitude of facts found during the summer's stifling session; and, whereas, wherefore and therefore, he and his solemnly profound associates were in duty bound to inform the Great and Honorable Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that

"Somethin's gotta be done."

* * *

Time and tide wait for no man, consequently seven years have passed since the Great and Honorable General Court of the "State of Mind" discovered that "somethin's gotta be done."

The scene shifts. We are in the parish rooms of a very snooty church of the fifty-seven varieties. The intelligentsia has foregathered to listen to words of wisdom

and of warning which are about to drip from the vocal chords of an "undersecretary" of the U. S. Treasury. The "undersecretary," as such are styled in proper, old 'Hengland, has traveled far and wide on the eastern continent. He has studied, at short range, the hopeful conditions prognosticated in Japan's employment of regimented boys and girls at twenty cents per diem. He has marveled at Bonny 'Hengland's production of "things at two and one-half pence per dozen" (tuppence 'apenny, to you). He has studied the alarming overload on Massachusetts "real estate" and informs us that such property now carried sixty-five per cent of the tax load while possessing only "thirty per cent of the wealth." His audience teter on the edges of their seats as they brace themselves to hear his pronouncement which will solve our economic distress for all time. He gives pause to his words as he approaches the climax of his evening's dissertation. The psychological effect of the temporary silence has the desired result. The truth is here.

"SOMETHIN'S GOTTA BE DONE!"

Significant nods of approval begin to gather into a wave which finally engulfs the whole audience. Bald heads, bushy heads, lean heads, fat heads, soft heads and bone heads, nod and nod and nod like a field of ox-eyed daisies bowing to the summer breeze.

"Yeah, somethin's gotta be done," says one to another.

"Somethin's gotta be done. The undersecretary said so."

* * *

The Great and Honorable General Court of the old Bay State, and the undersecretary of the Treasury of the United States, both are right.

"Somethin's gotta be done."

THOMAS N. ASHTON.

A Few Random Land Value Facts

AS one of those interested in support of the bill introduced in Congress by Representative Moritz of Pittsburgh (H. R. 6026) to impose an excise charge of one per cent upon the privilege of owning land in excess of \$3,000 value by one owner, I assumed the task of collecting data for presentation to the House Ways and Means Committee in the event of a hearing, indicating the amount of revenue to be derived from such a charge. I knew that little information of this character was available; but I hoped that I might develop sample figures which might be extended on some basis to larger areas and thus to the United States as a whole.

The task has proved almost impossible. No authentic figures are available anywhere to show the land values of the United States. On page 261 of the Statistical Abstract of the United States for 1934, issued by the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, it is stated: