

# Jakob Lange on Liberalism

[Translated by Grace Isabel Colbron]

[The following is excerpted from the last public speech of Jakob Lange, Denmark's leading Georgeist, at a meeting of the Henry George Society, September 28, 1941. Mr. Lange died December 27, 1941.—Ed.]

**T**HERE are people who dream that the Ragnarok we are now living through is the purgatory out of which shall come a happy, peaceful existence. Some seem to think this happy time will come under the Swastika, with the Fuehrer as the great Prince of Peace. Others wait to see the sun of peace arise in the East behind the red stars of the Scythe-and-Hammer flag.

The prospects are not bright. The present modern Thirty Years War will leave nations in poverty and drained of blood, with deep, aching wounds after years of enmity and prejudices eating into their souls. Where shall we seek the healing power?

At the moment true Freedom does not seem to most beings to be any answer to their problem; especially does it not mean what they call "liberalism" or "democracy." Even those who listen with considerable reservation to Hitler's pronouncements nod in agreement when he mocks at the "democratic states." And while many of the finest among our youth look hopefully towards the East, only a few see any ray of hope from the West.

Many explain this as the natural swinging of the pendulum. When one has, for some time, hoped and trusted in freedom, personal initiative and Parliamentarianism, and not found it, then one may well set one's hopes in organization, State Socialism, one-party power, as in the modern "Axis powers." I will not deny that, as in the individual, such changes of opinion can happen in a nation. But the real reason that the peoples seek new gods is that the old gods have shown themselves powerless to hold the faith one has set in them.

Now most of the blame on democracy is exaggerated. Democratic society, as developed during the past century, can well stand comparison with the days of absolutism. The years of democracy have been so short. . . What does a century mean in the life of a nation? True democratic constitutions permitting general suffrage have only, in a few countries, a century of use back of them. England, the representative land of Parliamentarianism, did not give voting power to all its citizens until after 1900. And even where universal suffrage holds, as in our country, we can look back on at least one hundred years handicapped by laws where brakes were put on by the superiority of the House of Lords; brakes of the worst sort that hold back any strong reform movement. This upper-class superiority, protected by the constitution, is all the more to be condemned in that we have never seen general suffrage work-

ing against this class; the oppression and exploitation of the people by this upper class is an every-day occurrence.

But even if this were an excuse for disappointment in democratic government, still doubts in its value lie deeper, lie in an inner breaking of the upholder's belief in its power to build.

Since the days of Adam Smith, it was clear to those who could see that by freeing human power and opening possibilities for the gifted, absolutism and the class-system of mercantilism could be transformed into a social system that would bring justice to humanity and make poverty something that belonged to the past. But the Malthusian doctrine of "over-population" had already conquered this clearer vision. And "Liberalism" became merely a system of "free competition" where prizes went to the strongest and the Devil could take the hindmost—as he was always supposed to have taken the "undermost."

Liberalism suffered from a blindness of those upholding free competition: In the basis of a truly liberal development was the assertion of equal rights to the earth as well as the individual's right to the fruit of his own labor. The monarchists here in Denmark seemed to understand the true interests of the people more than the spokesmen of Liberalism. For it was the monarchists who put through the reforms that broke the law of compulsory residence on the lord's domain. As long as Liberalism cannot understand what it has missed and does not write LAND AND FREEDOM on its banner, it cannot win back its lost prestige, nor lead the People's Cause to victory.

This inner blindness was also the reason why Liberalism's finest thought, free trade between nations, the main support of international peace, never came to full development. Only in England did it come near to an important victory in the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. No other country dared to take a real step in the right direction. Yes, not so many years later we saw the Corn Laws taken up afresh in Bismarck's Germany. And in another few years even England itself fled the Free Trade ideal. Imperialism—protection—the building up of an aristocracy of power, took the place of a world-citizenship in free trade and peace, which was the true fundamental ideal of Liberalism. And thus came our present generation's "Sword-time and Wolf-time."

If the thought of true freedom is ever to win its lost power among the peoples it can only do so when these peoples can restore and develop their ideals. They seem now to see no way back to the Europe we knew before the War.

Of course, popular government's parliamentary form can be simplified by doing away with the Two-Chamber system. It would mean speedier activity; a chance to hold its own with the present form of Absolutism. But this is only the more superficial side of it. What really matters is that popular government shall come to stand for the people's right to prosperity and peace, actually as well as externally.

To such an audience as ours, it is quite unnecessary to go into details. I wish only to point out how these two things are closely connected. If the equality of right to the earth is really acknowledged and carried out; yes, if we can only put it through sufficiently so that each young man who wishes it, will know that there is some corner of the land of his country waiting for his work; and that his work on it will not be just a hopeless labor, would not such a country put into his mind a barrier against war and violence? There would still be competition, but work would no longer be like on a race-track. This economic progress may come in a less forced tempo, but that is all to the good. No one can be blind to the way in which the race of competition and the advertising that belongs to it, makes life difficult in so many ways, even in the world of Art.

The international problem is merely a question of the general right to the land. A "Place in the Sun" is there for all of us. But individual ownership of the source of wealth is the foundation of mastery. There is enough of it all, even of rubber and oil that the world is now fighting for. But Imperialism demands sole ownership and preparation for war to secure this sole ownership. It is in this pin-wheel that the war-psychosis grows to the verge of insanity. With the free exchange of commodities between nations, this dangerous pin-wheel could no longer exist.

But if we would go into the very depths of war's roots, it is not enough to talk of Free Trade policies. The fear of over-population; one man's death providing bread for another, something to be gained by ruining one's neighbor—these make war seem a bitter necessity. Save yourself, push the others into the roaring flood of over-population! . . . But this theory overlooks the fact that it is really one man's *life* that is another's bread, and that it is better to have prosperous customers on the other side of a national boundary line rather than impoverished enemies.

War's apparent unavoidability, the bitter necessity of it, has been raised up in the popular consciousness until it becomes a patriotic service instead of the meaningless ugly mass-murder that it is in reality. Such superstition gives to the war god, as to any other Moloch, all that its worshippers have to give; their wealth, their lives. In an insane self-sacrifice and self-glorification they throw themselves under the wheels of their god's triumphal chariot; worse yet, they try to destroy the same ideals in their neighbors, who in the same insanity throw themselves against them—and earn thereby popular praise and admiration.

War is not a necessity. It is the world's greatest stupidity and scourge. The war-god is a false god who delights in devouring his adherents. This must be clear. Then will *deeds* done in *peace* become the things people admire, and the ordinary every-day householder will be a higher ideal than all the war generals and other Priests of Moloch. Then indeed will the sword be made into the plowshare.

This is the aim of true freedom for the people. We in Denmark have come mayhap a bit nearer to our ideals in this sense than the rest of Europe. Educated in the school of defeat, we have tried to raise ourselves in the world of work and of humanity. We do not know whether in the years to come we will still be able independently to work for the people's freedom. But at least we can in our thoughts and in our work go on building up the House of the New Freedom. . . . No outer power can hinder us. What we give will determine our power to live as a nation—and that nation's worth in life.