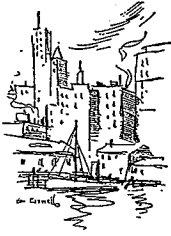


The State Is What We Make It—By HIRAM B. LOOMIS



AT THE conference of the Henry George School last summer I took the position: that the State is a necessity; a desirable, perhaps a necessary, condition for the freedom of the individual; and, if confined to its proper domain, an unalloyed good.

Moreover I claimed that the State must be strong, if it is to succeed in taking ground rent for the community. As a description of the State I quoted from page 212 of John Z. White's *Public and Private Property*:

There is a public organization also, but it is not contractual. It results from forces. It is dominion. It can be fair and just. Also it can be tyrannical. Meanwhile it is the means, and the only means, whereby a decent condition can be established in which social integration can come to its fullest and best development.

On the other hand, many of my friends have a different idea of the State, an idea to be found in Albert J. Nock's *Our Enemy the State* and in Fritz Oppenheimer's *The State*. In both of these books the fundamental function of the State is given as robbery. I quote from page 27 of the latter:

The state is an organization of the political means. No state, therefore, can come into being until the economic means has created a definite number of objects for the satisfaction of needs, which objects may be taken away or appropriated by warlike robbery. For this reason primitive hunters are without a state; and even the more highly developed hunters become parts of a state structure only when they find in their neighborhood an evolved economic organization which they can subjugate.

Note especially that neither "the more highly developed hunters" nor the "evolved economic organization" was a State. It took robbery of one by the other to create a State.

When such contrary ideas of the State are held in the Henry George Movement, it would seem advisable to thrash the matter out and try to reach a definition on which we could agree. Both groups regard equal rights for the individual as their objective. But one group regards the State as an obstacle in its path, and the other regards it as the only means to secure the objective. Exactly what is the State?

From my standpoint I submit the following, which I believe is a logical presentation of the situation, and which leads to a definition that is in close agreement with what the majority of people understand.

The main problem is the relation of the community (the group) to the individual. To my mind the first question to be answered is: Is there any field in which the group has control of the individual from the very nature of things? The answer is *yes*. Every child takes the language of the group just as it is given to him by his parents. It is his mother-tongue. It is the accumulated experience of the race handed down from generation to generation. Language changes slowly, and in the matter of language, at least, the group is practically absolute dictator to the individual. This is the universal experience of every people on the earth.

Nor is language the only field in which the

group dictates to the individual. In precisely the same manner folkways are handed down from generation to generation. In these matters changes are slow, and the group is practically absolute dictator to the individual. This phase of the question is discussed in great detail in a chapter in *Progress and Poverty*, entitled, "*Differences in Civilization — To What Due*," Book X, Chapter II.

In the early stages the group imposes its language and its folkways without being organized; but the time comes when the division of labor and the growth of population make it necessary for the group to act consciously as a group. Then the State is born. This means some form of organization; and it is immaterial what the objective of the organization may be, or how loose the organization — *the State is born*.

Probably the most common form of organization is the choice, or at least the general acceptance, of some man as chief of the tribe. This sometimes evolved into an absolute monarchy; but the real power remained in the group. The whole tendency of evolution has been toward democratic government. Witness the history of England from the time of William the Conqueror, who was practically an absolute monarch. First the barons wrested Magna Carta from King John; then the Commons gained recognition little by little, until today the king is little more than a figurehead, and the Commons can pass legislation over an adverse vote by the House of Lords. Witness also the revolution in Russia of a generation ago. Witness the India, the China, and the Dutch East Indies of today. Revolutions everywhere are in the direction of control by the people as a whole.

We believe that the United States of America is most advanced in the evolution of government. Let us examine what we have done and what we have. "We, the people," in adopting our Constitution, declared in so many words that "We, the people" are the sovereign. Legally sovereignty is the essential characteristic of the State. If we accept this as the basis of our definition, here, in the United States, then "We, the people" are the State. Moreover, this is in strict accord with what the vast majority of our citizens understand by the State.

Our next question is: What did "We, the people" do when we adopted our Constitution? We established a form of government. We provided for the selection of agents to do our work for us, executives, legislators, judges, all agents responsible to "Us, the people." Provisionally I am suggesting the word, government, for this group. I say provisionally because I would like to keep the word, government, for the abstract idea of ruling.

We have then two institutions, the State and the Government, both of which are necessary. On the other hand, neither is essentially either ethical or unethical. They are what we make them. If and when "We, the people" actually make up our minds on a point, we will get what we want, and our agents will do what we tell them to do. Most of them are trying to do that now, and we are learning to keep them informed as to what we want. Blocks of people hire lobbyists for that purpose, as the farm block, manufacturers block, labor block, real estate block, bankers block, doctors block, teachers block, etc. "We, the people" have the power. We need only to make up our minds.

In our Henry George School we all agree that the objective is equal freedom for the individual. In this matter what have our State and our Government to say for themselves? I maintain that, in spite of all their weaknesses, both the State and the Government have served the individual well. In support of this position I quote what to me is a fine passage from *Progress and Poverty*, Book X, Chapter IV:

"The general tendency of modern development, since the time when we can first discern the gleams of civilization in the darkness which followed the fall of the Western Empire, has been toward political and legal equality — to the abolition of slavery; to the abrogation of status; to the sweeping away of hereditary privileges; to the substitution of parliamentary for arbitrary government; to the right of private judgment in matters of religion; to the more equal security in person and property of high and low, weak and strong; to the greater freedom of movement and occupation, of speech and of the press. The history of modern civilization is the history of advances in this direction — of the struggles and triumphs of personal, political and religious freedom."

This is no small achievement of our State and Government; but as Henry George points out on the page immediately following the above quotation, our State and our Government have still much to do. He wrote: "But it is now manifest that absolute political equality does not in itself prevent the tendency to inequality involved in the private ownership of land."

Here is the next step toward equal freedom; and this is a step that the State, and only the State, can take.