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A PHILOSOPHY OF PEACE AND PRACTICAL STEPS

By Douglas J. J. Owen

ECONOMIC NATIONALISM, born of national rivalry and selfishness, is a form of warfare, as is seen by the fact that it requires the protection of armed authorities at the customs ports and all round the coasts, and in our home waters. Indeed, it is one of the marks of protectionist insanity that, as Henry George has pointed out, we maintain an enormous navy to safeguard our overseas trade routes so as to make it possible for merchandise to be brought to our ports without harm, and then make it as difficult as possible, financially, for the goods to be landed, and even keep a part of the navy as patrols to enforce this blockade against ourselves.—“Trade does not require force. Free Trade consists simply in letting people buy and sell as they want to buy and sell. It is protection that requires force, for it consists in preventing people from doing what they want to do. Protective tariffs are as much applications of force as are blockading squadrons, and their object is the same—to prevent trade. The difference between the two is that blockading squadrons are a means whereby nations seek to prevent their enemies from trading; protective tariffs are a means whereby nations attempt to prevent their own people from trading. What protection teaches us is to do to ourselves in time of peace what enemies seek to do to us in time of war.”—*Protection or Free Trade.*

We ought not to be surprised that the post-war tariff systems of the world have defeated the great disarmament movement of ten years ago, and resulted in another mad race in armament building, and wars and revolutions in different parts of the world.

Peace lovers who see the dangers of Tariff barriers will never find a secure resting place at that point. The Ark of the Pacifist movement, floating somewhat aimlessly on the waters of the flood, must bring itself to the Land, to the Ararat of Henry George's Philosophy of Peace.—“The doctrines of free trade have been intertwined with teachings that throw upon the laws of nature responsibility for the poverty of the labouring class, and foster a callous indifference to their sufferings. While protesting against restrictions upon the production of wealth, free-trade economists have ignored the monstrous injustice of its distribution, and have treated as fair and normal that competition in which human beings, deprived of their natural opportunities of employing themselves, are compelled by biting want to bid against one another.”—*Protection or Free Trade.*

When men are cut off from making a living for themselves on the land, because of the legalized system of private landownership, they are robbed of their ability to satisfy their hunger by applying their labour to the source of all wealth. They are reduced to a position of dependence and subserviency begging for a job at some factory gate, competing with and under-cutting their fellow unemployed. Such wage-slaves are the very stuff for cannon-fodder, and the easiest prey to the Jingo, the Chauvinist, the Imperialist politician.

The sport of cock-fighting, where two birds are set before each other and so enraged as to claw each other to death is not so revolting as this viler system which pens whole populations within the narrow confines of a restrictive land system, loads them with oppressive taxation, insults them with wretched

doles and wage pittances, and then goads them to fly at each others throats by the million, for some incomprehensible ideology, and for the vested interests of the few.

The philosophy of Henry George, presented with such a spectacle of mutual extermination by intoxicated and maddened populations has its simple yet pregnant reply : Give the masses liberty and they would not be such fools.

The economic man is always looking for the most advantageous directions and locations, at home and abroad, where his efforts will yield him the best return. But being also a gregarious, a social animal, he has to recognise the existence of others like himself, also claiming access to the same happiest locality. For he can only be charged with greediness and laziness when he seeks his satisfactions at the expense of other people.

There need be no conflict over these claims. They need not and should not be regarded as conflicting claims. Henry George's philosophy of peace shows how the mutual relations of men and of nations can be equitably and amicably adjusted to the varying productivity of the earth. The application of the Law of Economic Rent would furnish the means of adjusting all claims. If the economic advantages of the superior sites and territories were shared for the equal benefit of all there would be no more war. This can be done within national boundaries by the Taxation of Land Values, and internationally by the abolition of all restrictions on trade, immigration and settlement, and the breaking down of all trade barriers and manipulations of currency and exchange having the same purpose and effect as Tariffs.

Henry George has clearly taught the relation between war and the system of public debts and indirect taxation. No peace movement can hope to achieve its purpose without an understanding of the principles set out in the 16th chapter of *Social Problems*, and no stronger denunciation of the wickedness of war can be found than what he there says :—"Nor do the public misfortunes and corruptions of government which arise from the ignorance and contempt of human rights involved in the recognition of public debts, end with the costs of war and war-like preparation, and the corruptions which such vast public expenditures foster. The passions aroused by war, the national hatreds, the worship of military glory, the thirst for victory or revenge, dull public conscience ; pervert the best social instincts into that low, unreasoning extension of selfishness miscalled patriotism ; deaden the love of liberty ; lead men to submit to tyranny and usurpation from the savage thirst for cutting the throats of other people, or the fear of having their own throats cut. They so pervert religious perceptions that professed followers of Christ bless in his name the standards of murder and rapine, and thanks are given to the Prince of Peace for victories that pile the earth with mangled corpses and make hearths desolate !"

In thus relating the moral evils of war directly to the ease with which it can be financed by the existing iniquitous system of raising public loans and meeting the interest on National Debts by taxing the earnings and commodities of the people, Henry George reminds us of the practical and immediate problem which must be faced by all those pacifists and free-traders who denounce

trade barriers because of their international results in ill-will. This is the problem of alternative sources of revenue to replace the enormous revenue now derived from Customs duty. If, as the Van Zeeland Report urges, nations are to reduce their tariffs, where are they to find other revenue to finance not only wars, but also the normal peace time expenditure of the community ?

Henry George's proposals would go to the heart of each of these problems. By abolishing all taxation save that upon land values, the mutual benefits of international trade would be left free to effect peace between nations ; the masses in this and other countries would be relieved of the enormous burdens of taxation now imposed upon them ; a rising domestic prosperity would melt away the motives of international ill-will ; a new and natural and scientific source of revenue would provide for every normal communal requirement. The land monopoly would be destroyed and the resources of the land be thrown open on just terms to all.

[Extract from the Address by Mr Owen at the Matlock Bath Conference, 21st May. The full Address has been published as a 12-page pamphlet, price 2d., by the Henry George Foundation, 34 Knightrider Street, London, E.C.4.]

Air Raids and Land Values

At the General Meeting of the City of London Real Property Company, Ltd., on 7th June, the Chairman, Sir William J. M. Burton, said : "Recently I have been asked for my views as to the vulnerability of City property in view of air raid. I presume the City would be one of the targets on which an enemy would concentrate, but members would do well to bear in mind that when considering City property the greater part of the value is represented by land apart from the buildings thereon. In other districts outside the square mile of the City the greater value is in the buildings.

How happy is the position of the landlord ! Even in time of war the enemy's bombs can only destroy the building, but the land remains. And thrice happy to be a landlord in the City of London where the land values are so high that they exceed in value the buildings on the land !

The Duke of Gordon and the Crofters

From *George MacDonald and His Wife*, by Dr Greville MacDonald, published 1924 by Allen & Unwin :—

Almost within living memory a creditable story used to be told of Alexander, the fourth Duke of Gordon. At the farm-letting, just three years before George MacDonald's birth, the Duke's factor proposed breaking up several smallholdings and adding them to larger farms : "What are you to do with the cottars ?" asked the Duke. "They will seek a living elsewhere," said the factor.

The Duke postponed his decision till he had lunched, and then declared he would have all the people taken to the Deveron and drowned. "Oh, you joke, your Grace !" was the reply of the factor. "No, Mr ———," said the Duke ; "if we are to deprive them of the means of living, this would be the most humane course. No, Mr ——— ; they or their forebears were here before us, and they will be here after I am gone. They will retain their holdings."

But the Duke died five years later : George