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"GIVE US BUT WORK"

Not desert and forest, but city slums and country roadsides are nursing the barbarians who may be to the new what Hun and Vandal were to the old.

Nor should we forget that in civilized man still lurks the savage. The men who, in past times, oppressed or revolted, who fought to the death in petty quarrels and drank fury with blood, who burnt cities and rent empires, were men essentially such as those we daily meet. Social progress has accumulated knowledge, softened manners, refined tastes and extended sympathies, but man is yet capable of as blind a rage as, when clothed in skins, he fought wild beasts with a flint. And present tendencies, in some respects, at least, threaten to kindle passions that have so often before flamed in destructive fury.

To attribute all this to the teachings of demagogues is like attributing the fever to the quickened pulse. It is the new wine beginning to ferment in old bottles. To put into a sailing-ship the powerful engines of a first-class ocean steamer would be to tear her to pieces with their play. So the new powers rapidly changing all the relations of society must shatter social and political organizations not adapted to meet their strain.

Such a civilization only waits for the social intelligence that will adapt means to ends. Powers that might give plenty to all are already in our hands. Though there is poverty and want, there is, yet, seeming embarrassment from the very excess of wealth-producing forces. "Give us but a market," say manufacturers, "and we will supply goods without end!" "Give us but work!" cry idle men.

The intelligence required for the solving of social problems is not a mere thing of the intellect. It must be animated with the religious sentiment and warm with sympathy for human suffering. It must stretch out beyond self-interest, whether it be the self-interest of the few or the many. It must seek justice. For at the bottom of every social problem we shall find a social wrong.—HENRY GEORGE in *Social Problems*, Chap. I.

Civilization everywhere is being weighed in the balance. Science in all its fascinating advance takes no thought of established practice in Parliamentary or Municipal life, and "institutions long deemed wise and just" are being put to the test. Liberty would seem no longer to be a name to conjure with, and the cry is heard for a leader that will know for certain where lies the road to the great peace. The leader does not appear

and "Progress halts on palsied feet." The vultures that hang on the precincts of rebellion seem to sense their time has come to take risks, and as the door closes on the Lausanne failure, to paraphrase John Bright's famous note of alarm, you can almost hear the flapping of their wings.

From the seats of the Mighty the preaching has been Efficiency, Economy, Rationalization and Wage Reduction. It is along these well established conventional lines they have sought to win out. It is the current teaching, and the more we have had of it the worse things have become. These men seem to learn nothing from experience. No part-failure of theirs can induce them to think for a moment they are but part of the driftwood and not its steersmen. Statesmen, bankers, experts and statisticians have guaranteed the certain arrival some day of the new prosperity. They have banked on the future and the future is here!

The settlement of Lausanne, so named, has been aptly described by one of its strongest supporters as "not more than a step on the road to recovery from War Debts and Reparations, so long as the United States insist on payment of our legal dues." The next faltering step in the procession is the convening of a World Economic Conference, and the ink is scarcely dry on this "Gentlemen's Agreement," when word comes from President Hoover that if he joins in any such Conference War debts and Tariffs must be excluded from the discussion. He is "willing," he says, "to consider any bargain that would mean an expansion of the agricultural markets of the United States and the maintenance of their prosperity; but it is a certainty that these debts must not be cancelled nor must the burdens be transferred to our people." As Senator Borah said: To hold such a Conference would be like the play of Hamlet with the Prince left out!

In his radio address on the subject (*New York Times*, 23rd July) the Senator sketches a despairing picture of the United States and Europe. "Proud nations," he says, "have been driven to the verge of bankruptcy with 70 million unemployed men and women with their dependants forced to the edge of starvation." And again: "This is a man-made depression. Nature has not failed us. We are not the victims of famine or flood. Seed time and harvest and the industry of the people have constantly attended all through this depression. We are the victims of unwise and vicious policies. That is now admitted on every hand."

It is this unwisdom, the narrow politics of narrow minds that to-day is shaping the destiny of the race. If there be anything in the ethical principles that speak for the brotherhood of man, Ottawa is but one more signpost on the broad way that leads to destruction. If anyone doubts this, let him look in the chronicles and see how "Protection has always found an effective ally in those national prejudices and hatreds which are in part the results of the wars that have made the annals of mankind a record of bloodshed and devastation." A generation ago the belief was strong that salvation lay in the widening of the franchise; but then, as now, the problems facing society were at bottom economic in character and, despite the vote, unemployment has kept pace with all social growth.

Unemployment is the common experience of all lands and the fashion now is to give it an international setting. Each country affected believes, or its spokesmen affect the belief, that in some occult way the unrest in other countries accounts for the hard times in their own country; and that until the international mood changes, nothing can be done at home to save the situation. The authorities are so taken with this idea that they cannot give a single thought to the kind of unemployment that is home-made. The building trade

is slowing down, yet the need for better housing conditions is still urgent, to take a homely illustration. What, may we ask, has international relationships to do with this stoppage? If overcrowding cannot be abolished nor even mitigated in any one country by the Parliament of that country, how is it to be put right at some World Conference? If evil housing conditions in Edinburgh and Birmingham cannot be successfully dealt with until international affairs are less menacing, who or what was it that interfered with housing when Geneva was on the map only as a holiday resort?

The plain truth is that unemployment is largely, if not wholly, due to laws that have their roots not in international but in national injustice. As Carlyle put it in his day: There is work for all and to spare if we would begin to clothe the bare backs of England. And this verdict applies to every other country as well.

We are solemnly told that international affairs are complicated. The answer is, not more than national affairs, so far as unemployment goes. The politicians can have it either way; they cannot have it both ways. If they recognize the obstacles to the building trade at home and cannot remove them, they cannot help to solve the problem for other countries. There is no special dispensation for the members of an international conference.

Unemployment is a world problem in the sense that it is to be found in all the countries that are represented in the League of Nations—but only in that sense. The true interpretation is that British Unemployment is due to British law—the law that defends and maintains the existing system of land tenure and taxation. It is the same with German, French and American Unemployment. Every land is responsible for its own laws, and therefore for its own economic injustice. Land is the source of all employment; and just why the land question is not placed on the agenda at Geneva is a problem in itself.

Unemployment is a hard taskmaster and can drive its victims, whether manufacturers or workers, into every kind of cul de sac, under the impression that they are on the main road to new advance. The unemployed problem broke the Labour Government last year, and it will break this National Government in due course. It was Mr Baldwin who said the Protectionist policy of the Government would stand or fall by the test of its ability to solve the labour problem. It is so. As Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman said: "Our present land laws cause a greater drag upon trade and are a greater peril to the standard of living than all the tariffs of Germany and America, and even our own Colonies."

The object of the Ottawa Conference is to keep British trade, or as much of it as possible, within our own gates. Meanwhile, other countries are just as sedulously preparing opposing combinations. Buy British only means Buy German, Buy Italian, Buy French, Buy American. This is what our wandering counsellors must mean when they tell us that the problem is complicated and international. We shut out the foreigner and he proceeds at once to retaliate, or the foreigner takes this disastrous course and we follow suit. It is as irrational as it is uneconomic and un-Christian.

Alternative employment is the one thing needful and at bottom it is a land question. Nature is the everlasting employer of labour. If God's bounties are placed in bondage to monopoly, as they are, it stands to reason that any conference that ignores this fundamental wrong is a failure before it begins. The Ottawa Conference represents the power of concentrated capital within the British Empire, but it is more than that: Consciously and unconsciously it represents the unemployed millions who have been taught to look to it

for the immediate promise of better times. They are once more going to be undeceived. Ottawa can give neither markets nor work. If that were not so, tariff restrictions and subsidies would long ago have solved the problem in neighbouring countries.

The new bridge across the Thames, opened by the King last month, provides the latest illustration. When the bridge was crossed visitors were met at once with the familiar legend ELIGIBLE BUILDING SITES FOR SALE. It is the certain warning that the benefits of the new improvement are for monopoly and not for trade and commerce. Our new bridges and roads everywhere, created at the public expense, do not stand for industrial development; they have merely "enriched the landlords beyond the dreams of avarice" and raised higher the barriers to municipal development.

"Eligible Building Sites for Sale" is a home signal set against industrial expansion. Here is another from across the seas. The New York correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* writes: "Just on the eve of the Democratic National Convention more than 20 banks failed in Chicago in the course of a single week-end. They were all fairly small banks, and they failed because of local difficulties, the decline in the value of Real Estate and of securities deposited with them as surety for loans." This American illustration gives the business an almost international appearance!

As at Lausanne, the much-vaunted Disarmament Conference at Geneva has after five months' wearisome conversations come to an end without any hope except what is to be taken out of the usual adjournment. There has been much talk about the buying and selling of armaments, and we are now told: "It is obvious that the two subjects, disarmament and private manufacture, are inseparable, that private manufacture of armaments has barred the way in the past and that unless it can be controlled or preferably ended, there will be more wars in the future." It is the gospel of despair.

It is unemployment and not the private manufacture of armaments that has brought the Conference to an untimely end. If armaments are directly responsible for so much mistrust among the nations and so much ill-will, why not appeal to those who make the material to stop making it? If the idea is that the millions of workmen here and in every other land engaged in this inhuman traffic wish to continue, then we may as well stop talking about it and get ready for the next war, that will assuredly, this time, put an end to war. But no one does believe that the armament worker is unconscious of the fact that his product is one that is designed to tear human flesh to pieces—that its purpose is to make a mockery of every ethical and religious aspiration and put an end to progress itself. The armament worker knows this, but he must have employment and until this is available he is not taking part in the discussion.

Land value taxation is fundamental and therefore controversial, so we are told, and that what is wanted is something that will not question the prejudices or the interests of "the important people we must carry with us in any undertaking." It is the triumph of the Fabianism that twenty years ago drew the Liberal Party away from its resolution to make an end of the monopoly that more than anything else barred the way to industry and progress. We have had enough and more than enough of narrow policies that attack no interests and get us nowhere.

Trade is natural and those who from whatever reason would seek to restrict its free play, or make it more difficult to function at any time or in any place, are the real enemies of civilization. They would keep men apart who in common interest, capacity and skill ought

to be together for the good of all. They proceed along this reactionary course indifferent or careless of the established truth that the genius of art and invention knows neither nationality, creed nor colour. Economic law will see to it that no one nation or group of nations can keep to itself any new idea or new discovery that would better the tradition of mankind.

New markets and new work will not give land. It is land that will give new markets and new work. This is the natural order and must have its own place in the argument. The value of land is everywhere a communal value, and should be taken for communal purposes as the first step to communal peace and progress. Political revolutions are in fashion, but however expedient, or inevitable, they can only end in chaos so long as the distribution of wealth and opportunity favours the few at the expense of the many. The land value policy means free trade in its fullness. Based on social justice it will naturally and effectively distribute the benefits that come to society from co-operative effort and enterprise, both national and international. It will lay the foundation, as nothing else can, of a civilization that will stand the strain of any emergency. J. P.

THE NEMESIS THAT NEVER SLEEPS

In the historic and informing letters from Lord Macaulay to H. S. Randall, published in another column, the following interpretation of economic progress is of more than passing interest :—

"The day will come when in the State of New York a multitude of people, none of whom has had more than half a breakfast, or expects to have more than half a dinner, will choose a Legislature. Is it possible to doubt what sort of a Legislature will be chosen? On one side is a statesman preaching patience, respect for vested rights, strict observance of public faith. On the other is a demagogue ranting about the tyranny of capitalists and usurers, and asking why anybody should be permitted to drink champagne and to ride in a carriage, while thousands of honest folks are in want of necessities. Which of the two candidates is likely to be preferred by a working-man who hears his children cry for more bread?"

These prophetic words of the great historian, written seventy-five years ago, show him to have had more than a glimpse of the trend of economic law.

They recall a familiar passage in *Progress and Poverty* (Book 10, chapter 4) published twenty-two years later :—

"In all the great American cities there is to-day as clearly defined a ruling class as in the most aristocratic countries of the world. Its members carry wands in their pockets, make up the slates for nominating conventions, distribute offices as they bargain together, and—though they toil not, neither do they spin—wear the best of raiment and spend money lavishly. They are men of power, whose favour the ambitious must court and whose vengeance he must avoid. Who are these men? The wise, the good, the learned—men who have earned the confidence of their fellow-citizens by the purity of their lives, the splendour of their talents, their probity in public trusts, their deep study of the problems of government? No; they are gamblers, saloon keepers, pugilists, or worse, who have made a trade of controlling votes and of buying and selling offices and official acts. They stand to the government of these cities as the Prætorian Guards did to that of declining Rome. He who would wear the purple, fill the curule chair, or have the fasces carried before him, must go or send his messengers to their camps, give them donations and make them promises. It is through these men that the rich corporations and powerful pecuniary interests can pack the Senate and the bench with their creatures. It is these men who make School Directors, Supervisors, Assessors, Members of the Legislature, Congressmen. Why, there are many election districts in the United States in which a George Washington, a Benjamin

Franklin, or a Thomas Jefferson could no more go to the Lower House of a State Legislature than under the Ancient Régime a base-born peasant could become a Marshal of France. Their very character would be an insuperable disqualification."

It has to be noted that both the prophecy and the facts of the case happened long before the Great War that is supposed to account for all the ills of the body-politic, to say nothing of the body economic.

L. C. Smith writes: "I distributed about 6,000 free leaflets at the Yorkshire Miners' Demonstration at Barnsley some time ago. At the delegate meeting held at the Trades and Labour Hall, Barnsley, some months ago, Mr H. G. McGhee was the chief speaker. The delegates all enjoyed the speech and eagerly purchased the literature. During the last eighteen months Fred Adams and I have carried on a regular correspondence in the *Penistone Express*."

Speaking at Fareham, Hants, 29th July, Sir Thomas Inskip, the Attorney-General, said (*Glasgow Herald* report):

"The home life, as it existed in Britain, was so infinitely important and so essential to the life of the nation that, if he were Chancellor of the Exchequer, he would be disposed to take all taxes off the homes, which were as essential to the nation as churches and schools, which were not taxed."

It is freely admitted by Municipal Authorities that the system of raising local revenue on homes is a public scandal of long standing. In the House of Commons Debate on the Third Reading of the Finance Bill of 1909, Lord Robert Cecil (now Lord Cecil of Chelwood) said :—

"I agree that a large number of hon. gentlemen of Conservative opinions have pledged themselves to the Taxation of Land Values—but what for? As a substitute for the existing system of rating, which is a perfectly easy and rational proposition. I do not think anyone would suggest that the alteration from improved value to site value is any extravagant or novel proposition."

The "large number of Conservative gentlemen in favour of the proposal" were adequately represented in the House of Commons, five years earlier, in 1904, when 36 Conservatives voted in favour of the Second Reading of the Land Values Assessment and Rating Bill.

The alternative source of local revenue is to hand in the suspended Finance Act of 1931 with its provisions for Land Valuation and Taxation of Land Values. With valuation the local rating of land values is a mere matter of the will to change over, on the part of Sir Thomas Inskip and the Government of which he is a member.

"£250,000 available for investment in sound West End and City freeholds, leased to substantial tenants; large blocks of shops or pre-war houses in good-class suburbs or provincial towns, large parcels of freehold ground rents, blocks of West End flats, and any other form of real estate investment showing a good return; lots of £50,000 upwards preferred; a chain of cinema theatres or multiple shops would be entertained, as above sum does not exhaust the resources of the advertiser.—Principals, solicitors and trustees are invited to write details (in confidence) to Box T.884, *The Times*, E.C.4."—*Times*, 25th July, 1932.

Professor Nasu, a leading agricultural economist, states that the price of farm land in Japan is two or three times higher than in European countries. In good years 6,000,000 families can live on the land in Spartan comfort. In bad years they cannot, and the result is a load of debt which the State, the bankers, and the farmers' creditors must somehow lighten.—*The Times* (Tokyo Correspondent), 7th July.

We learn with much interest that Mr Henry George McGhee of Sheffield, son of the late Mr Richard McGhee, has been adopted as the Labour Party candidate for the Penistone Division. H.G.M. is a taking speaker and an able exponent of the Land Value policy. Wherever he goes he can be depended on to keep the Land Value flag mast high.