

MR. CHAS. H. SMITHSON'S SPEECH

Explaining the sixth demand, that the value of all natural resources should be held and utilised for the benefit of all, Mr. Smithson said :

The golden rule was the most practical of practical politics, but it required the environment arising out of just economic conditions for its advantages as a practical policy to be fully recognised.

The golden rule, being the evolution of a natural law, was a law which we disregarded at our peril, whether in our social, business or international relationships. This could be traced even in a state of society like our own based as it is on unjust economic conditions which create an environment conducive to the development of every selfish instinct, but in a society based on just economic conditions it would become transparent as a self-evident proposition.

What constituted a just economic foundation as a basis of society? The first essential was recognition of the fact that every member of the great and universal brotherhood of man came into the world possessed of an equal claim to use, share and enjoy the free gifts of the Creator. The second essential was that we must conform man-made law to that principle of justice. That principle was enunciated in the statement that the principles of Christianity, as submitted to the conference, demanded that "the value of all natural resources and of every privilege which owed its worth to the labour of all or to the necessities of all should be held and utilised for the benefit of all." It followed that it could not be in accordance with the dictates of justice for the value of natural resources to be

taken by a portion of the community and that any legalised institution which permitted such a partial treatment must therefore be unjust.

The statement of principle as enunciated did not preclude the private tenure of land, but it did provide that in justice to the community the whole of the economic value of natural resources should be taken for the benefit of all, that those who had the advantage of using some special natural resource should pay the community for that advantage and so leave themselves on an equality with everybody else in reference to the bounty of Nature.

It was Nature's law that "whoso does not work, neither shall he eat." But Nature did not impose upon man the necessity to work for his daily bread without at the same time providing him with the source from which by his labour he could satisfy every material want. The natural order, therefore, was for man to go in the first place to that storehouse to satisfy his wants. But it was just at that point that man made law interfered by giving to some privileged individual the legalised power to say: "You shall not obey this law of Nature without my permission." This was the disturbing element that perverted just economic relations throughout the whole social organism.

It was the power of enforcing service from others which constituted the grave injustice of legalising private control over natural resources. Robbed of the natural opportunity to employ themselves, landless men were driven into fierce competition with others for the employment which those who controlled Nature's avenue to employment could give them. This unnatural competition drove wages to the point of bare subsistence. Thus these men were led to regard competition as an unmitigated evil and they cursed competition instead of revolting against the unnatural conditions which prevented competition from being an entirely beneficial law.

Since it was a natural instinct for every man to wish to be his own master, to work for himself, given the opportunity for exercising this natural instinct, the competition would be between employers for employed. Then it would be seen that that same law of competition would be the most potent factor in raising wages to the equivalent of the full reward for the service rendered. Under these conditions competition would induce employers to apply the golden rule because those employers who were prepared to go farthest in that direction would be those who would obtain the services they required.

As for the man who would prefer to work for another rather than for himself, under existing conditions he had no natural standard wherewith to negotiate for wages. The opportunity of taking up a small holding, for example, would provide him with the alternative which would give him his negotiating status. This would constitute Nature's minimum wage, below which he need not work for another.

Let them consider the helpless plight of the landless man. Unable to find employment through the natural avenue, he migrated to the towns or mining districts, there further to depress the already overstocked labour market. The capitalist employer, taking advantage of that state of things, secured his labour at less than its true worth. But by opening up the natural avenues to employment in the primary industries, the constant supply of surplus labour would be cut off and competition in the secondary industries would be amongst employers for employed. This would lead employers to offer the most advantageous terms and conditions of employment which the industry could sustain, and would eventually develop industry on lines of co-operation and co-partnership, because it would only be the businesses who were willing to adopt that just principle in the conduct of industry who would obtain the necessary labour. That was what he meant by just economic conditions, as the basis of the social structure,

creating an environment conducive to the spread and development of the golden rule in industry. It would open the way to that co-operation in equality which was the active principle in all social progress. In all social relationships, justice demanded service for service.