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EDITORIAL

Civilisation at the Crossroads

The efforts to unite the nations after World War II have been scarcely more fruitful than the attempts made after World War I. Is it possible that the leaders in the League of Nations and the United Nations have put the cart before the horse? What greater contribution could there be to the uniting of the people of all nations than the removal of the present tariffs, quotas and other obstacles that prevent trade and commerce, and the repeal of taxes which penalise producers of wealth and make it possible for landholders, as such, to get rich and powerful by appropriating the fruit of other men's labours?

—Mr. J. Rupert Mason, Presidential Address to the 8th International Geogeist Conference, Denmark, 1952.

FEARFULLY the world enters on another year. Ugly new words—co-existence, co-extinction, and interdependence—are on men's lips. Eyes and minds are turned towards the menacing skies. But the threat to civilisation comes from another quarter. It is rooted firmly and wholly in the Land Question. Unless that eternal question is solved once and for all, justly, swiftly and universally, mankind is doomed. Unless that is done, our civilisation will perish as surely, though more dramatically and more painfully, than each of its predecessors.

How different the world could have been. Almost eighty years ago Henry George showed the simple, practical means whereby men could live fearlessly together in peace, freedom and friendship, happy and prosperous. His was no idle dream. He contended that men needed—as they yet need—to enjoy equal access to land and all the resources of nature. They must be free to produce and to exchange with each other the products of their hands and brains. The value which each individual adds by his efforts to natural materials is wholly and exclusively his. The value which men in society give to land by their presence and activities belongs equally to them all.

Technically simple though these reforms may be, the obstacles in the path to their adoption have proved immense. Henry George realised that the struggle for freedom and justice would be arduous and protracted. In a memorable passage towards the end of his immortal classic, *Progress and Poverty*, he wrote:

"The truth that I have tried to make clear will not find easy acceptance. If that could be, it would have been

accepted long ago. If that could be, it would never have been obscured. But it will find friends—those who will toil for it; suffer for it; if need be, die for it. Will it at length prevail? Ultimately, yes. But in our own times, or in times of which any memory of us remains, who shall say?"

That is still the position. But now, *unless* these truths are accepted—and legislatively implemented—millions will suffer and die for want of it.

Henry George is not without honour in his own country. Indeed, one of the most heartening signs in a sombre world is the awakening American interest in him and his proposals. But the U.S.A. has far to go before it can assume the rôle George outlined in his stirring Fourth of July Oration in San Francisco in 1877 when he said:

"Is it too soon to hope that it may be the mission of this Republic to unite all nations of English speech in a league which, by ensuring justice, promoting peace and liberating commerce, will be the forerunner of a world-wide federation that will make war the possibility of a past age, and turn to works of usefulness the enormous forces now dedicated to destruction?"

The United States have been generous with gifts and aid but reliance on such devices, and on military pacts and nuclear weapons, are inappropriate and inadequate in present circumstances. The world is rapidly reaching the position where the stark choice is between either freedom and justice—or extinction.

Equal economic freedom for all is no longer the distant goal of starry-eyed social reformers who would build a

better world, and who address themselves to man's nobler instincts. It is now a practical political question of self-preservation, of whether mankind is to survive or perish. Slowly politicians are coming to realise this. For instance, Mr. Henry Luce, the proprietor of *Life* magazine is reported as having startled the U.S. Congress last November by stating that the United States should adopt complete free trade. He suggested that such a policy might become a first class political weapon of inter-continental range, and that only a bold step like that could save America from being compelled to compromise with the enemy.

TRADE AND PEACE

The peaceful, unimpeded exchange of goods for goods to the mutual advantage of all participants can scarcely be regarded as a "weapon"—it is only when governments restrict trade that force is necessary—but that apart the truth of Mr. Luce's contention is self-evident.

Similarly Mr. N. Krushchev in an interview with three American journalists last November (to which we shall recur) said:

"The renunciation of trade discrimination would also be an important step in improving relations."

The communique issued in Paris in December by the NATO powers after their four-day "summit" conference referred to "evidence of the growing desire for intellectual and economic freedom" in the communist countries. The declaration affirmed:

"We seek an end to world tension, and intend to promote peace, economic prosperity, and social progress throughout the world. . . . We shall reach this goal only by recognising our interdependence and by combining our efforts and skills in order to make better use of our resources."

It would be over-optimistic to read into those words any intention by NATO politicians to remove the fundamental barrier to production, prosperity and progress which is enshrined in the private misappropriation of the rent of land. But if the words mean anything at all, they must mean that the trade barriers will be dismantled or materially lowered. For, as Dr. Viggo Starcke, a member of the present Danish Cabinet, said at a special *Land & Liberty* meeting in London five years ago:

"Protection is the beginning of war. At first it is a 'cold' war, cold civil war, against your own people, and in cold commercial war against other peoples, but it often ends in real war. The history of the Customs House is more bloody than the history of the executioner. The history of protection is more bloody than the history of nationalism. To try to prevent goods from crossing frontiers is to run the risk that armies will come instead."

The only way to true and enduring peace is for the leading nations of the world to adopt the policy outlined in the *Declaration of Human Rights Based on Equal Freedom* issued by the International Union for Land-Value Taxation and Free Trade, which is reprinted on our inside front cover. That policy has been repeatedly advocated

by prominent men in every major country. The wars, revolutions and slumps of the last half century, and the suffering they left in their train, were the price that humanity has paid because their pleas were ignored.

TOLSTOY'S WARNING

How different the course of events would have been if the Russian Georgeist Count Leo Tolstoy had been heeded. So great was his popularity that Suvarin, the editor of one of the biggest and most reactionary Russian dailies, nevertheless wrote:

"We have two Czars: Nicholas II and Leo Tolstoy; which of the two is the stronger? Nicholas can do nothing against Tolstoy; he cannot shake his throne. While Tolstoy is no doubt shaking the throne of Nicholas and of his dynasty."

It was not the pacifist-Georgeist who toppled the throne, drowning the country in blood and forging the shackles which yet bind the Russian people. The Bolsheviks came to power because they were able to exploit to their advantage the grievances and injustice which Tolstoy would have removed. On July 26, 1907, he wrote to the Prime Minister, Stolpin, pleading that he end the campaign of terror against the peasants:

"You are on the wrong road. You have two possibilities in front of you. The one is to continue not only to take part in but to direct all the deportations, forced labour, and executions, and not having achieved your aim, to leave behind you a sordid memory. Or, doing the opposite, to advance the peoples of Europe by helping to destroy the old, enormous injustice of the appropriation of the soil. In the latter way you would truly accomplish a great and good task, and you would appease the people through the most efficient of processes by giving satisfaction to their most loyal demands. This would stop these horrible crimes which are perpetrated on the side of the revolutionaries as well as on the side of the Government."

Three months passed before the Prime Minister replied:

"I do not deny the doctrine of Henry George but believe that the Single Tax could in time help in the struggle against the big estates. At present I do not see any reason why we should, here in Russia, chase the owners from their land which they cultivate better than the peasants. Quite the contrary, I see the necessity of making it possible for the peasants to acquire a piece of land of their own . . ."

On January 28, 1908, Tolstoy wrote again to Stolpin:

"Your two errors: the violent struggle against the irresistible force of the people, and the consolidation of the ownership of land can be corrected by a simple, clear and achievable reform. It has to be recognised that the territory of the country is the equal property of the entire population, and a land tax has to be established which would correspond exactly to the privilege enjoyed by each site. This rent would replace entirely all taxes. . . ."

This second letter remained unanswered.

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RUSSIA, CHINA, GERMANY

Russia today might have been a great liberal nation, loved and respected by all who cherish freedom and justice if Tolstoy's advice had been taken. Nor would modern China be a communist prison if she had followed on the path laid by her first President, Sun Yat-Sen. In a statement to American journalists issued soon after he resigned from office (reported in the Chicago single-tax paper, *The Public*, April 12, 1912) he said :

"I intend to devote my future to the promotion of the welfare of the Chinese people as a whole. The teachings of your single-taxer, Henry George, will be the basis of our programme of reform. The land tax as the only means of supporting the government is an infinitely just, reasonable and equitably distributed tax, and on it we will found our new system. . . . We will embrace all the teachings of Henry George . . ."

Hitler would have remained a humble, harmless house-painter if the German land reformer, Dr. Adolphe Damaschke had succeeded. The poverty and discontent on which he climbed to power—and the spurious cry for *Lebensraum* in a country of vast estates owned by a privileged minority—would have been uprooted if taxes had been levied on land values. There would have been no *Drang nach Osten* in search for foreign markets if Germany had removed her tariff barriers.

THE MOTHER OF EVIL

Country after country has paid a fearful price because a privileged minority has been left in monopolistic possession of the national heritage—the land—and trade has been restricted and frustrated. In most, if not all, influential voices have been raised against the basic causes of economic and social malaise. Among the many heard in Britain was that of Sir (then Mr.) Winston Churchill :

"It is quite true that land monopoly is not the only monopoly which exists, but it is by far the greatest of monopolies—it is a perpetual monopoly, and it is the mother of all other forms of monopoly. . . . In this country we have long enjoyed the blessings of Free Trade and of untaxed bread and meat, but against these inestimable benefits we have the evils of an unreformed and vicious land system. In no great country in the new world or the old have the working people yet secured the double advantage of free trade and free land together, by which I mean a commercial system and a land system from which, so far as possible, all forms of monopoly have been rigorously excluded." (*At Edinburgh, July 17, 1909*).

Almost fifty years have passed. The "perpetual monopoly" continues to exact an ever-increasing toll ; the Tories have withdrawn the "blessings of Free Trade" ; and the Prime Minister, although professing a high regard for Sir Winston's sagacity, openly sneers at Henry George and those who seek to advance his policy.

The record is clear. Two inescapable conclusions emerge. The U.S.S.R., NATO and all the other dissonant

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contending bodies, with their hideous armouries of A-Bombs, H-Bombs, I.C.B.M's, Sputniks and the rest, have been spawned by frightened men divorced from the soil. Their mother—to use Sir Winston's graphic phrase—is the mother of all monopolies. There may be a place for military alliances and disarmament discussions. But unless and until trade barriers are smashed, and Mother Earth is thrown open on equal terms to all her children, civilisation as we know it, and human life itself is at the disposition of terror-stricken, power-crazed politicians.

THE WEST CHALLENGED

Justice is the highest form of expediency ; freedom is the antidote to fear and war. People in the Western democracies must take the initiative ; their gagged and bound brothers and sisters behind the Iron Curtain are powerless to do so. Mr. Kruschev has challenged the U.S.A. as "the mightiest capitalist country" to an economic competition with the U.S.S.R. as "the mightiest socialist country." In his November interview with Mr. William Randolph Hearst, Jnr., editor-in-chief of the Hearst Newspapers and the International News Service, and two other American journalists, Mr. Kruschev said :

"In peaceful competition we shall work to win. . . . You are threatened with a peaceful offensive, a peaceful competition in the manufacture of consumer goods and articles that serve to improve the culture and life of the people. In this we shall be relentless. The competition will show which system is better."

Americans have accepted the challenge. They can win hands down and lick the boots off the Russians *if* they put a Henry George free economy team in the field. At the same time they will destroy a powerful Soviet propaganda weapon. Mr. Kruschev told Mr. Hearst that the U.S.A. is dominated by belligerent "reactionary monopoly circles" whose intention it is :

"under cover of the clamour about a military threat on the part of the Soviet Union, to increase taxation, to place fresh burdens on the shoulders of the people, to develop the war industry still more, in order to make bigger profits."

If Soviet politicians genuinely believe that charge has substance, economic liberalism in the United States would abate their fears and relieve world tension. Even if they do not—and this is the more likely—their campaign of repression at home and misrepresentation abroad would be made infinitely more difficult. Into the bargain, the whole American people would benefit enormously and NATO would be transformed from a mere politicians' and soldiers' organisation into a league, similar to but broader than that which Henry George suggested in his 1877 Fourth of July Oration.

P.R.S.

REMINDER TO READERS

Those who would like to see "Land & Liberty" grow are invited to send names and addresses of any who may be prospective readers. Sample copies will be sent without charge.