

## The Soldier—Then and Now\*

SPEECH IN TOLEDO, O., BY RABBI MICHAEL AARONSOHN,  
BEFORE THE 37TH DIVISION OF THE A. E. F. ASSOCIATION

SEVENTEEN years ago our national life was imperiled, and we did something about it. Thoroughly unprepared for modern warfare, nevertheless we brought the World War to a close by the most thrilling demonstration of dynamic idealism in the story of man.

Whatever others may say in deprecation of the part we played in that historic drama, none can take from us the passion of patriotism we enjoyed in those days, which tried every man's soul. Our detractors may scoff, but we were happy warriors. Seventeen years ago when we National Guardsmen of Ohio were mustered into the Federal service we looked upon ourselves as the chosen defenders of the nation—indeed, as the champions of the rights of the common people in every part of the world.

Now when you and I were formally inducted into the Federal service, we pledged ourselves to defend our country and our American Constitution. Such an oath taken under such stirring circumstances is as binding today as it was in August, 1917. A certificate of discharge and the payment of a bonus could not relieve us of the obligation to defend our country and to preserve our Constitution. We who witnessed the lives of our comrades snuffed out on the field of battle, we who are acquainted with the grief and the travail of our disabled comrades, cannot be discharged from active service either by the free-will offerings of grateful countrymen, or by the gratuities wrested from a ballot-conscious Congress. We can but hold all medals, all such flattering forms of tribute, in disdain. The love we have for our country cannot be bartered away. That flame of patriotism can be extinguished neither by ingratitude, nor by ridicule, nor by pensions. We were soldiers in 1917, we are soldiers today—ready again to defend our country and to preserve our American Constitution.

We recognize that eternal vigilance must be the watchword of every National Guardsman of our Republic. We know how dangerous it is to be lulled into innocuous passive-ism. We have innumerable foes that day and night work for our destruction. More than we realize

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the foes we must be most wary of are those which in satanic strategy center their attacks upon the moral and spiritual unity of our countrymen. For our enemies know that so long as we have a virtuous population that will rise up and stand as a wall of steel around our Republic, we need have no fear of invasion. But in any event, when the national life is threatened, either by enemies from without or enemies from within, we National Guardsmen must not be silent, we must not compromise our patriotism; we must do something about it.

Confident of the unsurpassed will and power of my fellow-countrymen to triumph over every natural and human force that now tries the nation's spirit, I warn you not to look to Europe for a way out of our economic dilemma. We can, we will be victorious eventually if we patiently rely upon the honor, the good sense, and the virtues of our American prophets. We must not borrow patterns of government. All that we need today are men of courage and vision, men in whom there is the spirit of Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln to show us the way to victory.

As I survey the childish practices of politicians, as I consider the collective irresponsibility and abject abdication of authority on the part of our legislators, as I weigh the words of clergymen and educators, as I examine the experiments of statesmen and industrialists, as I observe the enslavement of nearly thirty million of my countrymen to poverty and to the fear of poverty, as I study the supreme paradox of the ages—untold millions of unemployed, under-nourished, world-weary, crushed men, women, and children tramping the streets and highways of the cities and villages of this opulent Republic,—I marvel that this nation, so incomparably great in war, should appear so helpless in the solution of our political-economic imbroglio. Surely in this generation we are not lacking men of vision and courage and talent needed for this crisis! We were soldiers in the World War; we are soldiers today; our country and our Constitution are in danger. We must do something about it.

With the utmost respect for your intelligence and patriotism I am going to set before you this afternoon a plan of action no less American in spirit and content than the Declaration of Independence, the Federal Constitution, and the Gettysburg Address of Abraham Lincoln. The sure remedy that I shall prescribe for the salvation of our national life was conceived by an extraordinary American more than fifty years ago, and was dedicated to the proposition that all men are created by God for the full and noble enjoyment, according to each man's capacity and taste, of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The programme I shall advocate is not in the nature of political reformation. It has no conflict with the Constitution. Actually it calls for the fulfillment of the American dream of democracy. It provides for a minimum of public regulation, and for a

maximum of personal liberty and security. It is the Single Tax programme as divinely set forth by that illustrious American whom Prof. John Dewey ranks among the greatest of the great of all times—that American philanthropist and prophet, Henry George of blessed memory.

In essence the Single Tax programme of Henry George calls for a drastic revision and simplification of our system of taxation. With all my faith I affirm that had our statesmen in 1881 carried out the true principles of political economy as set forth by Henry George, panics, depressions, mass unemployment, and the general demoralization of industry and commerce would be as obsolete today as are the leech and the barber in the field of medicine, the astrologer and the alchemist in the field of science, and wizards and witches in the field of religion. We must confess that in the field of political economy we are just as backward today as were the Egyptians in the days of the pyramid-building Pharaohs. Foremost among the nations of the world in industry, commerce, invention, and in all the arts and sciences; advanced in religious and intellectual tolerance, we are nevertheless in our present system of taxation as benighted as were the Romans in the days of the Caesars. Our glorious ideal of democracy has been mischievously entangled by a Gordian knot of unnatural, unreasonable, and mutually destructive forms of taxation: forms of taxation that strike down brave and free men in their quest for honest employment, that rob labor and capital of their just rewards, that enchain the farmer, that crush the life out of industry and commerce, and that like vampire-bats suck the life-blood out of the nation.

Centuries ago the legends of the Orient foretold that whosoever loosed the Gordian knot would become the master of Asia. Alexander the Great cut the knot with the keen edge of his sword. We soldiers of a former day, we soldiers of today, can cut the Gordian knot that is now choking the life out of our nation if we will but dare to strike through with the keen edge of the sword of truth.

We can extirpate poverty, we can increase the wages of the workmen, we can secure the investment of the merchant and the manufacturer, we can provide decent employment for all our countrymen, we can root out crime and vice, we can diffuse wealth universally, we can do justice to the veteran, to the widow, to the orphan, to the infirm, and to all the forgotten men and women and children in every part of this wonderful country, we can insure the income and the independence of the farmer, we can effect sweeping reductions in the budgetary requirements of municipal, State and Federal departments of government, we can provide houses of learning for all our children, we can prevent political and moral disintegration, we can make gigantic strides towards social, industrial, and even world peace—if we will but obey the laws of nature and of God; if we will but heed

the voices of history and of science;—we can do all these things by applying the simple and sovereign remedy of the Single Tax programme of Henry George.

It is altogether fitting and significant that so righteous and yet so simple a plan of national and world recovery should thus be publicly advocated by an American soldier. For all the land we so proudly call our own, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from Canada to Mexico, together with Alaska, Hawaii, and all other possessions of this empire-republic—was for the most part won and secured by the valor, the sacrifices, and the perseverance of the American soldier.

It is important that we bear this fundamental principle in mind because the Single Tax of Henry George has its basis in the right to the use of all land, together with the payment of community-rent to the State in the form of a tax on the bare value of land only. There is to be no confiscation of land. There is to be no change in the method of sale or the use of land, and no monopoly, no calamitous speculation in land. Furthermore, instead of a multiplicity of altogether unjust and monstrous forms of tax-exploitation, we will have but a Single Tax on the site value of the land, which the courage and the will to sacrifice of the American soldier under the grace of God now make secure for the use and the blessing of all.

Soldiers of 1917; Soldiers of today; we have no selfish ends, no private interests to serve. That flame of patriotism still burns brightly in our souls, and we can feed that flame by the knowledge of the presence of kindred living spirits in every part of this country yearning and praying, as I do, from day to day for fresh opportunities, for creative and upbuilding service under the Stars and Stripes.

On this day of our reunion and of our rededication to the ideals and to the patterns of the master-builders of our Republic, I present the ethical and economic testament of Henry George as the American programme. It is for you, my comrades, to study, to know, and then to become the persuasive dauntless advocates of this simple and sound system of harmonious social life within the wise and immortal frame of the American Constitution. Hours thus spent in an earnest effort to bring about this reconstruction of our tottering political-economic foundations by freeing our countrymen from the tyranny of taxation,—without the sacrifice of life or limb—will speedily be rewarded by God with victory and peace, liberty, justice, and plenty for all the sons and daughters of America.

**A** proposed solution of an economic problem which includes depriving a wealth producer of part of his product deserves no consideration. Social justice can not be secured through legalized robbery. No one who advocates such a measure, however sincere, can be a safe economic guide.