

STATESMANSHIP WITHOUT A PHILOSOPHY

Explaining the Non-Success of Certain Conferences at Geneva

By HON. CHARLES O'CONNOR HENNESSY

(Paragraphs from an Address made at the Hotel Pennsylvania, New York City, at the Congress of the Henry George Foundation of America, 13th September, 1927. What is here printed has been published in pamphlet form by the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade, 11, Tothill Street, London, S.W.1, of which Mr Hennessy is the Hon. President)

I have been greatly heartened by reading in our London office some of the letters that have come in during the last year, especially since the circulation of our Geneva Memorandum demonstrating "The Interdependence of the Economic Causes of War and Industrial Depression." This classic document is now circulating in eight European languages, and must continue to have an increasing favourable effect upon public opinion. We have found new and helpful points of contact in Italy, in Switzerland, in Czechoslovakia, and elsewhere. From a long letter that came recently from a noted watch manufacturer of Heidelberg, let me quote this:—

"It would have been a great happiness to meet your leading men for you have done me extraordinary pleasure by letting me see how actively and how rightly you present our question. I began to give up hope of human progress and even to be bitter when I thought about the way in which the sublime thoughts of George had been so obscured, and *Progress and Poverty* itself had seemingly been written in vain. I thank God that my faith has been restored, and you cannot imagine how happy it has made me to see what able, alert and devoted people you have to lead the movement. Now I am convinced that the great thoughts of Henry George can never be lost!"

* * *

I, too, have come to the conviction, my friends, not only that the great thoughts of Henry George can never be lost, but that they are destined in the near future to influence the thinking of the world and the action of governments as never before since *Progress and Poverty* was published 49 years ago. It is a sign of the times when a great educational leader like Prof. John Dewey (who I find is respected in Europe as he is here) should publicly rate Henry George as among the great social philosophers of all history, while commending his simple and practical plan for restoring justice and prosperity to a troubled world by liberating labour and capital from the shackles which now bind them. It is a sign of the times that the Economic Conference of the League of Nations last May should discover and declare, however indirectly or timidly, that the misery of millions of people on the European continent was the result of the obstacles that selfish and ignorant statesmanship had created to interfere with the normal production and distribution of wealth.

Plainly the world needs the wisdom and the sanity of the philosophy of Henry George. Philosophy has been defined as *critical and reflective thinking*. No other man in the world's history has ever produced a message relating to the constitution and maintenance of just social relations which has been marked by such critical and reflective thinking as that which Henry George has given us. In that message, to quote the happy phrase of Prof. Dewey, we find "the analysis of the scientist combined with the sympathies and aspirations of a great lover of mankind."

It would now seem that it is the absence of any definite philosophy in the minds of the leaders of men that is responsible for most of the social ills of the world to-day.

Let me illustrate this thought by a further reference to that Economic Conference of the League of Nations last May, to which our International Union submitted, without visible results, that respectful and dignified Memorandum to which I have referred. The Conference had been called into being by a resolution of the League Assembly to search out the economic ills of the world (and especially of Europe) and to offer recommendations for their cure. There was no difficulty about diagnosis. The sources of the troubles of Europe were plain enough. It was revealed that as a result of the new political nationalities set up by the Versailles Treaty, there are now 27 frontier obstructions to trade, where only 20 existed in 1914. There are 6,000 more miles of tariff barriers than there used to be. One of the unanimous conclusions of the Conference was expressed in these words:—

"The obstacles of all kinds placed on the circulation of goods and capital have had deplorable results, by hampering the normal play of competition and by imperilling both the essential supplies of some nations and the not less indispensable markets of others."

Reviewing the proceedings of the Conference, the President, Mr Theunis of Belgium, declared, in effect, that they had uncovered the fundamental source of Europe's economic misfortunes. He expressed his conviction concretely in these words:—

"The main trouble now is neither any material shortage of the resources of nature nor any inadequacy in man's power to exploit them. It is all, in one form or another, a maladjustment; not an insufficient productive capacity, but a series of impediments to the full utilization of that capacity. The main obstacles to economic revival have been the hindrances opposed to the free flow of labour, capital and goods."

These statements help to account for the facts stated at the Conference by the editor of the London *Economist* that there are ten million workers out of employment in Europe, and that governments, eight years after the *War to end War*, are raising by taxation and spending two and a quarter billion dollars annually to maintain the organization for war.

Well, the penalties that the world must continue to

suffer from the guidance of leaders who cannot lead because they have no philosophy, were revealed by the action of the statesmen in concluding this Economic Conference. The social disease had been accurately diagnosed. The economic life of a continent was crippled and bound in shackles. The remedy, plainly, was Freedom. But all that the Conference felt moved to do about it was to recommend *that tariff barriers be made no higher*, and that a beginning be made toward the reduction of them.

In a word, the Economic Conference of the League of Nations was ineffective, and Europe with its 27 hostile trade frontiers, is left to continue the policies that serve only to increase human misery, while sowing the seeds of new national animosities and new wars.

* * *

I think that one of the most significant events in international politics, although it may not have been noticed on this side of the ocean, was the recent resignation of Lord Robert Cecil from the British Cabinet, which involved his retirement from official connection with the League of Nations. He was, I believe, one of the authors of the Covenant, and a sincere and devoted champion of the League, since its inception. In spite of his aristocratic lineage and Tory Party affiliations, I believe he is respected in England by men of all parties for his patriotism, his sincerity and his constant efforts to find a basis for the establishment of permanent world peace. There was almost a note of despair in his letter of resignation, which seems to have been precipitated by the failure of the Disarmament Conference at Geneva—perhaps to some extent by the futility of the Economic Conference. In his letter to Premier Baldwin he strikes this solemn note:—

"I believe that a general reduction and limitation of armaments is essential to the peace of the world, and that on that peace depends not only the existence of the British Empire, but even that of European civilization itself."

To the followers of Henry George it must seem that the trouble with Lord Cecil and with other sincere men who are seeking the way to world peace, is the lack of a philosophy, the absence of the faculty for critical and reflective thinking. It seems to us the very height of futility to seek the road to disarmament through such conferences as we have witnessed at Geneva; through meticulous discussions by uninformed professional warriors, relative to the number of battleships more or less, or the calibre of their guns, or the length and tonnage of the armed cruisers that this or that nation is to be permitted to maintain. It all seems like children playing a game of peace or war, especially when we reflect that in all probability the next world war will be decided not by battleships or massed armies but by ships of the air raining down death-dealing explosives and chemicals upon civilian populations.

* * *

That critical and reflective thinking which is philosophy might teach statesmen that wars will end when the causes that lead to wars are ended, and that these causes, as our International Union is seeking to make plain, are mainly economic in their character. We must seek disarmament in men's minds, by removing from them the suspicions, hates, fears and animosities engendered by the narrow and selfish policies by which one nation seeks to profit itself at the expense of another. We believe that if lasting peace between nations is to be maintained, if contentment and happiness is to come to the distressed peoples of the world, these ends are not to be attained by mere formulæ, or by the most solemn of covenants and treaties that unenlightened statesmanship may negotiate. So long as greed and selfishness and passion and ignorance are allowed to

rule the nations of the world, covenants and treaties may be broken as easily as they are made. Gestures of worthy intention and good will, like that of Locarno, are not sufficient while the conditions that make for ill-will still remain to menace mankind with the shadows of new world wars. This I say not in deprecation of the League of Nations, for I firmly believe in it as a great and growing instrumentality for international education, conciliation and progress.

* * *

Let me close on the note sounded by Lord Cecil in his letter to Premier Baldwin resigning from the British Cabinet. *"The hope of the future,"* he said, *"lies in an aroused and instructed public opinion."*

Henry George said the same thing more than forty years ago when he declared that the work set for any man or group of men who would improve social conditions is the work of education; the work of arousing men to the intelligent use of political power. *"Until there be correct thought,"* he said, *"there cannot be right action. When there is correct thought, right action will follow."*

That is the great work to which we are summoned—the propagation of the great truths which Henry George has left to us; truths that, as he told us in one of his last speeches, have power to revivify and regenerate this great city, this State, this nation, and the whole world.