

Georgism On The Threshold

By Sidney J. Abelson

The one hundredth anniversary of Henry George's birth finds the world at large in a more critical situation than it has ever before been in all history.

There have been Great Wars before—perhaps these might even be called World Wars, taking into consideration the world as it was known at the time—but never before, not even during the Napoleonic period, has there been the actuality or the prospect of an internecine conflict involving directly and indirectly the entire planet on which man lives. What if the Peloponnesian War checked the magnificent achievements of the Periclean age? There were a dozen other societies unknown to the Greeks, flourishing in their own ways, or bearing the nascent fetuses of new civilizations. Today there is only one civilization—the Twentieth Century Civilization—and let but one section of it go down and all the rest will go down with it.

Napoleon ravaged Europe for a decade and a half—but his depredations could not affect the Americas. Or, if we assume that the Little Corporal could have extended his empire to the new world there would still be China, India, Japan, Australia, Africa with which to cope. Territorially the world then was as it is now, too large for any single dictator to conquer and hold. But today, unlike any previous time in history, the world is so small economically that the slightest disturbance in one country propagates itself in short order in all countries. For better or for worse the world has reached its final phase of interdependence—there is no new land to be discovered, no place of refuge for the hounded torch of civilization. Material progress has made the whole world one. United it stands; divided it falls.

But the world at the moment is far from united. Every day brings alarming news of fresh controversies, and even before this issue of

The Freeman reaches its readers (if any credence can be given to news reports) another Great War may be raging in Europe.

Must we stand by idly and watch civilization die a horrible death? I have heard many express an affirmative answer to this question. I have heard it said and I have seen it written that a final struggle to the death between Communism and Fascism is the inevitable fate of mankind.

These opinions of despair are not entirely without foundation in fact. The great powers of the world are lining up in two great camps—the Fascist Powers versus the so-called Democratic Powers. The latter are falling increasingly under the sway of Communist philosophy though in some cases the political sympathies of the ruling clique (as in England) seem to be directed more toward Germany than to the Russian motherland of Communism.

Now from the point of view of freedom it does not matter whether this analysis of a Communist-Fascist struggle is accurate or not, for it is obvious that freedom is doomed whenever and wherever either of these philosophies triumphs. The struggle, therefore, is basically one of freedom against anti-freedom. And our problem is to make the nature of this struggle plain to the whole world.

Marx predicted that Socialism would arise first in that land which first outlived its "capitalist" destiny. (To the embarrassment of all concerned it arose first in a country notorious for its lack of modern industrial development.) The Marxist creed, even if sound, could apply only bit by bit to those nations which had reached a minimum industrial stage, so that to achieve the world-wide Socialist paradise might take hundreds of years. The Fascist and Nazi doctrines are so strictly jingoistic, so narrowly nationalistic in scope that *ipso facto* they are disqualified from serious scientific consideration.

The Roosevelt New Deal, though

free from the obnoxious racial doctrines of the Fascists-Nazis and also from Marxist scriptural circumscription, is still a plan that can apply only to America or to another nation with the same abundant resources and national characteristics. There is, therefore, no hope that either Russian Communism, German Nazism, Italian Fascism or American New Dealism can save the world. And as for Britain and France it is patent, that the most these nations can do is make heroic efforts to save their own skins. There is nothing in the policies of Chamberlain or Daladier which the world in general can use.

Of all the doctrines for social betterment now extant only that of Henry George has world-wide and immediate applicability. Only George offers complete economic and civil freedom for all races, all nationalities, all religions. I submit to the judgment of logic and experience that the test of a theory in the field of applied science is its capacity to be utilized universally and immediately—and I say that only George's social and economic doctrines so much as offer the challenge to be utilized in this fashion.

The establishment of Communism in Russia required, in the words of Lenin, that "the present generation plough itself under as fertilizer for the generations to come." The New Deal must plough under crops and destroy livestock to achieve its ends. Hitler finds it necessary to exterminate the Jews and destroy the Catholic and Protestant churches to achieve his ends. Mussolini can seek his goal only by waging war or maintaining a state of war—destruction's most effective instrument. Only George says: **Build!** Only George says that destroying can lead only to destruction; that the way to achieve a better society is through construction—here and now!

I have little sympathy with those Georgists who feel that many years must pass before "the world is ready for Georgism." In plain fact, the

world is ready now—no other doctrine can be applied to the solution of social ills so readily and so universally, without destroying a single generally accepted good thing in society, without disturbing the normal conduct of life.

The other day a Communist acquaintance of mine expressed friendly contempt for my activities in the Georgist movement. His point was simply this: that it does not matter whether Georgism is right or wrong—to him this point was not even worth debating—for when the time comes for change, when our present regime collapses, only the Communist Party will be ready to take it over. And when the Communists take over management of social and economic affairs there will be no room in America for any opposing doctrines, or for that matter any variants whatever of the Party Line.

Unfortunately, the cynicism of my acquaintance is wholly justified by the facts as they stand now. In the event of a general debacle Georgism, with its present limited strength, would not stand a chance for survival. In short order, our literature, our educational apparatus, our journalistic organs—all our means of articulation and in many cases our very selves to boot, would be destroyed. Perhaps it is true that truth crushed to earth will rise again—but the Communist homicidal efficiency being what it is (and the Nazi-Fascist, also) this rise may very well take something of the form of a Phoenix-ian resurrection. As in the case of that mythological bird, perhaps truth will be doomed to a 500-year-long figmentary life, and finally, a trial by fire, to rise miraculously from its own ashes once more to enjoy the uneasy blessings of life.

When it comes to sleeping out the Dance of Life, Rip Van Winkle was a piker compared with some of the experiences of truth—for example, the anatomical mistakes of Galen, a second century physician, remained rule-of-thumb for medical practitioners for about a thousand years. Nature provides us with no guarantee that truth will prevail or that error will be corrected. When the Communists or the Fascists take power Georgism will be no more.

Now Georgism represents the highest truth man has discovered in his search for an explanation of the social and economic laws that govern human life. But what doth it profit a cause if it gain the whole truth and lose the opportunity to spread that truth? What is the good, what is the practical value of the knowledge we have? What can we do with it?

How can we keep the torch of truth burning? How can we convert that torch into a beacon light for all mankind? These are the questions which trouble me—and which will continue to trouble me until I have found their answers.

As I have already said above in a slightly different way, the Georgist doctrine embodies both means and end. It is the only doctrine which offers a direct and not a devious road to universal prosperity and peace. George says, behold! here are the means, and within these very means are the ends you seek. Freedom becomes literally its own reward. Provide freedom and it will nourish itself on its own substance. We Georgists need employ no trickery to explain our goal, nor any ambiguity to set forth our means. We do not offer pie in the sky after an indeterminate period of intensified human suffering—we say without reservation, let there be free land, free enterprise and free men; and in the fullest sense you will have free men—free politically, free economically, free intellectually and spiritually. We say freedom and we mean freedom.

What then, can be done to keep Georgism alive during the dangerous days ahead; how can Georgism be made ready for use when, in the inevitable hour, a faltering civilization will have, seemingly, but a Hobson's choice between one form of inhuman dictatorship and another?

Many years of experience in expounding the doctrines of Henry George have given the answer—an

answer which current world experience confirms: Avoid direct political action—fire cannot extinguish fire; educate mankind in the logic, the justice and the humanitarianism of Georgism; make many millions of people conscious of the fact that humanity is not doomed to be decimated by the cross-fire of extremists pledged to fight each other to the death, that nature herself has ordained laws for social conduct which are inherently orderly, laws which, if observed, would make all mankind prosperous and which would conduce to that state wherein "man to man the whole world o'er will brothers be for a' that."

"Poets and philosophers are the true legislators of mankind." Ultimately we conduct our affairs under the guidance of philosophers—though politicians do make capital of and take the credit for the philosophical ideas of their betters. Today the collectivist ideas of Karl Marx are being adopted in one way or another, in vain efforts to solve the problem of poverty in almost every country on earth. Tomorrow, the principles of freedom of Henry George will be applied.

Does this seem like an impossible hope? Let us see what are the facts?

In this century, more than ever before, no nation can gain more than a Pyrrhic victory in war. Victor and vanquished both are losers—because modern war is more destructive than war has been before. In the next few years—five or ten, perhaps fifteen at the most—the Communist and Fascist extremists will exhaust themselves in military and economic wars of attrition. A large-scale political triumph of one or the other will mean the doom of civilization.

The task of saving civilization, then, becomes a race—between the advancing forces of dictatorship and the progress of educating mankind in the natural laws of society. Men will not accept dictatorship so long as they have the hope of freedom. That hope will remain alive if Georgism is kept alive. In the hour of fate that is sure to come mankind will turn to Georgism—IF. The race against chaos can be won—IF.

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The "if" means that to succeed Georgists must intensify their efforts a thousand—or ten-thousand fold. The educational process—the instillation in the minds of mankind of this hope and the expounding of this doctrine—must be increased and multiplied to a rate surpassing that of Nazi-Fascist-Communist activity.

Just how this can be done is a subject to be taken up later. In the meanwhile, on this hundredth anniversary of Henry George's birth, it is appropriate to bring out these facts: that the logic of Georgism has never been shaken; that today, more than ever before, the Georgist movement is alive and growing; that today the world is in critical need of Georgism; and that tomorrow, if Georgists do their job well, the world will accept Georgism.