

The Price of Freedom

By SANFORD J. BENJAMIN

THERE is a dangerous growth of false optimism among Georgeists at present which bodes ill for the success of the movement. I refer specifically to those Georgeists who visualize a free society in the space of five or ten years, and who speak glibly about the time when the people, tired of governmental control or interference in their lives, will turn away from Stateism and build a real *laissez-faire* community. To achieve this end, these idealists would educate enough of the population until they will be strong enough to force the politicians to push through the necessary reforms. The emphasis, it should be noted, is placed on the peaceful solution of our problems—the ballot—a worthy means to gain happiness but in my opinion a naive appraisal of the chances of success, as well as an incorrect interpretation of the meaning of Georgeism. I base this contention on three reasons.

First, no special privilege is as time-honored by rich and poor alike as land ownership. In fact the privilege of owning land is considered a successful goal. One does not have to be a Georgeist in order to predict that land owners would fight land reform. The Spanish civil war was essentially an uprising of landlords when the government attempted to break up their estates; and far from acknowledging the right of the people to cultivate the land, the so-called democratic nations backed the insurrectionists. It should not be overlooked that, in order to hold on to their privileges, the land owners called in foreign soldiers—a lesson Georgeists should ponder when they think of achieving their reform in any one country.

It is not unlikely that the British government would have sent an expeditionary force to Mexico over the oil land issue had it not been for the growing menace in Europe and the disfavor it would have held in the American mind. As it was, economic pressure forced a partial settlement—compensation—thereby completely nullifying the issue of justice in common property in land. But first an attempted rebellion *was* created in the northern section of Mexico, which failed only because the Mexican people would not support it; yet it might have succeeded if foreign soldiers had been landed.

The concern in England over the Russo-Finnish war was directed more toward the nickel mines than freedom for the Finns. The present war itself is fundamentally a conflict for mines and oil wells, although the well-organized press has befuddled the populace into supposing that it is a war of ideologies rather than one of economic issues. Therefore, if armed conflict over the possession of land arises among non-Georgeists, how can we expect that Georgeists, after their ideas have spread to engulf the majority of men in this country, will not have to take up arms to free the land? In

fact, we may not even reach the stage of enlightening mankind to a degree of actual physical threat to the landlords. The chances are that we would be outlawed, as other groups against the propertied class are outlawed in Europe.

The second reason why the peaceful method of education alone will not suffice, is the fact that education is a slow and tedious process and more than likely to be resented by the vast majority of the people. This sounds like an unwarranted assumption, but it is not; for education, based on principles of logic, aims to break down certain cherished and fixed traditions which are the foundations of man's unstable position. Yet the very traditions we are endeavoring to break down are entrenching themselves in the minds of the people. Look around. What are people saying? Are they not crying for security—security guaranteed by the State? Are they not asking for the antithesis of George's concept of a free society? Are not the present wailings of the population the product of the tradition that only the State has the power to house, feed and clothe mankind? An empty stomach has no time for education. It is time we Georgeists awoke to the meaning of the times and frankly admitted that the trend toward complete Stateism is too far advanced at present to be checked by the advocacy of the single tax. What Georgeists overlook here is the fact that understanding the free society and achieving it are two distinct steps, not one; nor is it possible to achieve the single tax without understanding it first. If this were not so then Georgeists would be able to organize a political party now, and ballyhoo it to success.

We take pride in being able to point out the fallacies of Marxism but we neglect to give his followers credit for being realists. It is not a coincidence that Marxists head most labor unions. Georges Sorel, the syndicalist, advocated complete domination of trade unions by militant individuals who would be ready to call a general strike and paralyze industry. Marxists adhere to this principle, and I have no doubt that they will use it when the nation is in a chaotic state—as was Russia after the war. The ballot is to the Marxist only a means of solidifying his position during peace time. He knows that the transfer to actual power, however, can only be accomplished through force—at the proper time. It is in this respect that Georgeists fail when they speak about the peaceful solution of the world's evil through the ballot, the very process they—ironically enough—condemn when they say “you can't legislate prosperity.”

The third reason why education alone will be ineffective in achieving the free society, is the very nature of the reform. George advocated a revolutionary change which can only come about during a revolutionary period. Great reforms throughout history have come about only after great struggles and periods of unrest. The conditions of a privileged economy do not permit peaceful reform. And, when there is “peace”, reforms are not demanded vociferously.

Certainly the single tax could never take hold during periods like the 1920's, when unrest is not vocal. Man's struggles for freedom spring mainly from economic causes; hence we cannot acknowledge the efficacy of the ballot for much else than pacifying the populace with palliatives.

If proof is required to amplify this contention we need only point to the classic example of appeasement, a policy essentially synonymous with the palliative method, which was to prevent the present war. Now actually there is no difference in nations fighting for the possession of monopolistic privileges, and groups inside a nation contesting for local privileges. The English, desiring to cling to their world monopoly of mines, markets and oil wells—obtained through the self-same methods Hitler is employing—realized that only by maintaining peace could they hold on to their possessions, since the disillusionment which settles in after the war is the greatest changer of traditions and the most potent force to let loose the forces of dissatisfaction. That they have finally resorted to war proves only that economic questions cannot be solved by bargaining, as in legislative forums, since bargaining is essentially the way of the compromiser—and Georgeists know no compromise.

However, if we are in the midst of a revolutionary change, it is the streamlined version of the absolute State. For obvious reasons, I do not relish the thought of being enslaved under the approaching collectivist society; but it must be understood that, whereas the founding fathers escaped to America to safeguard their freedom (what a chance they had to establish the single tax!), we have no free land on which to go. Indeed, we may rightly say that the free American land, acting as a haven for the more vociferous dissidents of the Old World, lessened the tension again past absolute rulers and thus preserved their battered systems for the reckoning they now face—hence the trend to alter the system of government in all the major powers of the world within a comparatively short time.

The fate of Georgeism under a rigid collectivist state—whether Left or Right—will not necessarily be one of complete doom. The Henry George School may be closed, "Progress and Poverty" may be burned as contradicting the ideas of the master of the land. But the one thing that no government can destroy is the unyielding will on the part of some of the people to question the existing State, if only in whispers and if only in their minds. This, together with the fallacy inherent in Stateism, must in time overthrow even the most absolute of dictatorial systems. To understand this recurring fight for freedom throughout history is to comprehend where our real strength lies; for only when, with each succeeding swing toward freedom, certain traditions are left behind, do we approach the free society.

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Trade in The Hitlerian Empire

By PAVLOS GIANNELIA

"INTERNATIONAL Commerce cannot prosper if its current is held up by barriers of excessive tariffs."

So stated the memorandum Mr. Sumner Welles handed to Mr. Reynaud, during his visit to Europe this past Spring. Our esteemed British contemporary, *Land and Liberty*, thereupon wrote: "Neither France nor Great Britain, even between themselves, has shown the least intention meanwhile of reducing the tariffs and the trade obstruction."

Not only has this been the case, but much worse; neither the British nor the French Empires have applied the free trade principle among their own territories! Besides the internal customs duties (*octrois*), Greater France had tariff restrictions between European France and all parts of the French Empire.

Great Britain still has tariffs between England and the Dominions, between England and the Crown Colonies, and between all parts of the Empire.

What is the status of trade in the new Hitlerian Empire? German economists have consulted past German policies. In German history, the customs union of the Northern German States (*Deutscher Zollverein*) was the forerunner of the political union of the German Empire. The Third Reich has remained trustworthy to the customs union principle, and has made a certain application of it in the new Hitlerian Empire. Tariffs have indeed been introduced in the newly conquered territories, but they are employed in the opposite of the usual sense of "protection." Immediately after the conquest of every territory, a free flow of trade was allowed for goods imported *from* the new territories *into* the Altreich; and "protective" tariffs were maintained in the opposite direction—that is, tariffs were imposed on goods going *from* the Altreich into every other part of the Hitlerian Empire.

This policy shows that the German economists, notwithstanding their opposition to free trade, realize that tariffs are more efficacious in handicapping the importing rather than the exporting country.

This "protection" was imposed immediately upon the conquest or annexation of Austria, Sudetenland, Bohemia-Moravia, Poland, probably Denmark and Norway, and probably also France. It was expected to be maintained for about a period of one year after every annexation, but will probably be continued as long as it is advantageous to the Reich.

A mutual benefit, and a strengthening of position, would have resulted from a complete free trade between France and Great Britain. It is to be hoped that Britain will yet learn the lesson. If she persists in maintaining the pernicious "protective" system, she will sooner or later learn that tariffs are not protection, but economic suicide.