

## Bare-Faced Land Gambling

WE have received several advertisements of sites in the Tennessee River Basin in anticipation of the Muscle Shoals development. What can be done to bring to the attention of the administration this orgy of land speculation now beginning? Though the men in Washington are blind to the general relation of the subject here is a specific condition they cannot avoid seeing.

Mr. W. G. Stewart, of Reading, Pa., has written to President Roosevelt calling attention to a circular advertising a free trip to Muscle Shoals in the interest of lot-selling, a bare-faced land gambling appeal to profit by what the Government is about to undertake, a copy of which we have seen. Secretary Howe, "in the absence of the President," writes to Mr. Stewart saying: "I am venturing to bring your letter to the attention of the Tennessee authority."

## Reviews of Prof. Geiger's "Philosophy of Henry George"

THE "Philosophy of Henry George," the remarkable book from the pen of Dr. George Raymond Geiger, has received a number of notable reviews. We have already commented on William Soskin's review in the *New York Evening Post* and have quoted from that admirable summary from this gifted reviewer.

Floyd F. Burtchett, Assistant Professor of Economics in the University of California, says of the work in the columns of the *Los Angeles Times*:

Although the chapter "Economics and Ethics" seems to be an insertion rather than a fundamental treatment of the philosophy of Henry George, it is probably the most important in the entire book. In it again and again the non-material valuations of life flash forth with a brilliancy that is seldom encountered: Why should there be poverty and starvation in a nation which is blessed with abundance of everything necessary to supply itself with plenty? Those of us who stand apart from the intense struggle of the day and who must view the economic ruins about us with some consternation ask the same question. But, we also query: Will not the new economic structure which is surely rising from our devastated economic order be better? One agrees with the author's epilogue: "There is an urgent, menacing need for human intelligence to become sensitive to the malformations within the social structure."

This volume is commended to every student of our civilization.

Willis J. Abbott in the *Christian Science Monitor* says in part:

This book of Prof. Geiger's is both interesting and useful. His sketch of the life of his subject is an admirable brief story of the fashion in which "a philosopher" had been in turn a sailor and a printer, a journalist and a tramp, and a political candidate powerful enough to have worried Tammany Hall. He might well have added that the philosopher also worried the defenders of privilege in every land, and was able to face the leading economists of England to measure intellects with him—a contest in which he did not come off second best.

A review of less consequence appeared in the *New York Times Book Review* and was answered by John Luxton,

## BOOK REVIEWS

### A WORK OF ADMIRABLE RESEARCH\*

Here is the tale of that peculiar American phenomenon—land speculation. From the pre-Revolutionary days to the Florida of 1924-1926 the exciting story races on, now humorous, now tragic; at one time merely entertaining, at another heavy with portentous implications—(implications, however, which Prof. Sakolski deliberately or unwittingly avoids indicating.) Across the pages of the book parade famous American figures, all of them land speculators: Washington, with his thousands of acres of wild land; Robert Morris (who graces the frontispiece as "America's foremost land boomer") and his 6,000,000 acre of unused land; Franklin, Patrick Henry, Fremont, Sutter, Aaron Burr, Daniel Webster. . . . Even names resounding in Europe, Madame de Stael and Joseph Bonaparte, found themselves playing with that great American bubble, for, as Dr. Sakolski states in his opening line, was not America itself a speculation? Alexander Macomb buying the whole Adirondack country for eight pence an acre; speculation in the City of Washington ruining the plans of its early builders; the engineering of the notorious Yazoo frauds and other equally notorious swindles—all are drawn as with the touch of fiction.

Prof. Sakolski's book is a brilliant example of contemporary economic research. First of all, it presents to us a field which previously had been almost untouched by scholarly efforts, and its presentation is clear, calm and convincing. Then, it is extremely well written: Graphic, not over-wordy, and shot through with a strong vein of iron humor, the book is remarkably entertaining reading. It perhaps might be criticized for occasionally falling into that most modern technique of "over-smartness" but, after all, that may easily be excused when an author is dealing with the unsavory activities of historic big-wigs.

Finally, its niche in modern scholarship is assured by its splendid aloofness. Prof. Sakolski never gets excited. He is telling us and not judging. His bubble-puncturing is quite dispassionate.

Of course it is this last aspect that will irritate those who are more actively interested in land and its functioning in the dimension of economic exploitation. Here Dr. Sakolski permits himself to draw few conclusions, although the ones that he does draw are most suggestive. He finds that land speculation is indeed a bubble, bursting in every case. He admits that land speculation brings no *permanent* benefit to anyone, although he assumes that speculation seems to be valuable in opening up new lands for use. The speculators themselves, he shows, ended in almost every case as bankrupts and paupers, the only real lasting fortunes in land being made by those who bought land to hold and not to trade. Perhaps most important of all Dr. Sakolski elaborates the well-known connection between land speculation and the panic of 1837.

The land reformer will wish that the author had expanded somewhat his conclusions. For one thing, a presentation of the connection between land speculation and *all* of our periodic business depressions (the book was published a little more than a year ago) might have been an example of such an expanded conclusion. Again, a more fundamental treatment of land as an agency in the processes of economic production and distribution might well have been included in such volume on land speculation. But such wishes certainly are not criticisms of Prof. Sakolski. He can reply very easily that he was writing such a book, perhaps that he is not even interested in such a book; and a man cannot very well be criticized for something he has written!

But Dr. Sakolski can be criticized for his rather cavalier reference to Henry George (page 255.) He states that George saw the effect but not the benefits of land speculation. Now, it must be confessed that the present reader of the book found no convincing arguments or even attempts at convincing arguments, on the part of Prof. Sakolski.

\*The Great American Land Bubble, by A. M. Sakolski. Clo. 373 pp. Price \$3.50. Harper and Bros., New York City.

that disclosed any such benefits. It is true that there is the suggestion of speculator's function in opening up wild land for use. But, after all, is not the very criticism of land booms—a criticism which this reviewer certainly has found outlined even with some bitterness in the book—the argument that speculation throws marginal land into use sooner than necessary, forces unneeded improvements and resulting lavish borrowing on the part of local governments, and results finally in a collapse as population refuses or is unable to sustain these artificially swollen land values? Is that not the reason why land speculation is indeed a bubble? Normal demand will throw land into use; ballyhoo is not required. The press of population directs the use of land; not the hoop-la of the land speculator.

Prof. Sakolski also states that had Henry George lived during some of the fiascos of land speculation, such as in the post-Revolutionary days or in the town-jobbing prior to 1837, and had he witnessed the loss of great fortunes instead of seeing the California land boom, his economic philosophy might have been quite different. It is obviously idle to speculate on what George's work might have been had he been a different man. But it does not seem that Dr. Sakolski had seriously underestimated George's contribution by such a remark. He has apparently not permitted himself to regard George's fundamental concepts as anything more than a parochial by-product of a land boom.

But to get back to the book and away from such digressions. "The Great American Land Bubble" is a psychological volume as well as an historical and economic one. It deals with the American spirit as much as with the American speculator. It gives exposition to that perennial urge for gambling which is hardly indigenous to these shores. The Colonials, for example, had little else to gamble with except land. Unfortunately they did not have stock markets. And so they bought land merely to re-sell. Prof. Sakolski's book is thus a picture of American culture and it will certainly take a place in the bibliography of American cultural history. It is none the less a portrait of personalities. Colorful rogues and profound patriots, fools and philosophers—all present themselves here as bubble-blowers.

The work is an excellent piece of historical research. It is diverting, instructive, disillusioning. It is not, and does not pretend to be, a work in economic theory or in economic reform.

GEORGE RAYMOND GEIGER.

#### UPTON SINCLAIR PRESENTS WILLIAM FOX\*

In legal circles the story is told of a Wisconsin murder trial where, after the opening address of the District Attorney, one of the jurymen suddenly arose, put on his hat, and started to depart. When the court interrupted him and sternly demanded a reason for his extraordinary action the Teutonic juror replied: "I want to get away from here quick, before the murderer's lawyer starts to change my mind"

I am reminded of this story on finishing this book. Not that I was convinced of the truth of its charges. On the contrary, I am satisfied that the downfall of the vast chain of movie houses assembled by Mr. Fox cannot be attributed solely to the extravagance and dishonesty of his successors. Generally bad business conditions, I suspect, had much to do with the debacle. It could hardly be expected that a depression which could wreck a two billion dollar Insull public utility, or the Bank of the United States with nearly 400,000 depositors in New York City, or the Chicago-Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad with a capital structure of over 400 million dollars, would leave the amusement field untouched. In short, this is an ex parte, or one sided statement, and must be taken "cum grano salis."

Not that "Big Business," as it is conducted in this year of grace, 1933, in the United States, is incapable of such scoundrelly actions as are here described. I, for one, would like to hear the defense, however, before drawing conclusions.

The accused, among whom is the Chase National Bank of New York City deign, however, not to reply. Certainly they have instituted

no libel action against our author, evidently feeling it the part of wisdom to ignore his book.

Upton Sinclair, as usual, is highly irritating. He repeats his charges ad nauseam; he calls the victim, "The Fox" which I, submit, is in poor taste.

Sinclair's remedy, as usual, is Socialism. Fox on the other hand proposes to abolish "short selling" in the stock market and to forbid national banks to have affiliates and security companies. As to the first of these remedies, it may be said that the better opinion of experts is that it would be ineffectual as well as inadvisable to forbid "short selling;" as to the second remedy, that is now well on the way to accomplishment.—B. W. BURGER.

## Correspondence

### ASKS FOR A SPECIAL PROGRAMME

EDITOR LAND AND FREEDOM:

This summer there will be a notable gathering of Single Taxers in Chicago. There will be a speaking programme that will express the best thought on the World's Economic ills. They will adjourn with a feeling of having a successful session. But until these conferences result in a plan that will get all of us working together in an effective way to attain the Single Tax, a plan that all can work for, the conference will have been little more than a gathering of friends in the cause.

The purpose of this letter is to reach those that see the need of concerted action. A combined force in one locality through the initiative to do what we are trying to do by scattered effort.

What we can accomplish all depends on how the Single Taxers respond to a campaign in a state with the initiative. Our campaign in Missouri got us 48,000 votes here in St. Louis. This was our pioneer work with very limited funds at a time when the people were not asking for a change. With the world in a state of collapse, with no guide out of the plight, we have a great opportunity to unite our force in one state. There is nothing that can stop the initiative petitions and it will make its own publicity. Every signer is a potential voter for it and when we are getting the signers we are campaigning or votes. There is a noticeable desire among us to find some effective plan of team work.

The depression has crippled our resources. To make the load equal to our ability, we could centralize on making a Single Tax city out of St. Louis, Denver, Pueblo, Los Angeles, or Stockton. Colorado has local option in taxation so it would not need a state wide amendment. As all amendments are constitutional, the measure can be made applicable to state taxes as well as local taxes. The slogan should be "A Single Tax City" and make the amendment strong enough so it will be a Single Tax City. We should not fool ourselves, for whatever kind of measure we have, it will be known as the Single Tax.

St. Louis, Mo.

E. H. BOECK.

### AGREES WITH BROTHER BOECK

EDITOR LAND AND FREEDOM:

I wish to commend you most highly for your intelligent review of Prof. Tugwell's book. Personally, I am not at all surprised at the silly mouthings of the average "professor of economics." I honor the notable exceptions, such as Harry Gunnison Brown, John Dewey, etc. I recall one of them—Prof. LeRosignol, hoping that is the correct spelling—of Nebraska University, who, once at the University Club of Omaha, in an address, stated, "Perhaps you will call it pharisaical, but Henry George will never be recognized as an authority on economics for the reason that he was not one of us—meaning he was not a college bred man." At the close, I told him that he had used the correct word—"pharisaical."

Since that day I have often wondered if that is not the idea that slumbers in the back of the heads of most "professors of economics." Yet there is a basic reason why such professors are so numerous. If

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