

PEACE

Henry George

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An address delivered at branch meeting of the Universal Peace Union, at Wiley's Grove, near Poughkeepsie, N.Y., on Sunday, August 25th, 1889.

Mr. President, Ladies, and Gentlemen,—I am glad to be here this Sabbath afternoon, and to take part in this assemblage of one of the two American branches of the International Peace Society. This part of the State of New York, this county of Dutchess, received in the beginning, I believe, a large infusion of the people called “Friends”—those who, in an age when true religion seemed buried beneath formalism, and, in the temples erected to Christ, the truths of Christianity were forgotten, taught that men should look to the inward light, should listen to the inward promptings, and in daily life and conversation should model their conduct upon the principles of “The Prince of Peace.” Their peculiar garb is now seldom seen; their peculiar speech is seldom heard, unless it be in the privacy of their domestic circles; but this gathering here today is one of the evidences that their spirit yet lives. And there is need of it today—of that bearing of testimony against war and the spirit of war; of that bearing of testimony for peace and the Prince of Peace.

Twenty centuries have almost gone since over the stable in Bethlehem of Judea, the angels sang their song of “Peace on earth, to men good will.” Yet never before has the earth seen such monstrous armies; never before has human ingenuity and human industry been devoted to the preparation of such terrific engines of destruction. A few years ago I came across the Atlantic with an American inventor. We were talking of the possibilities of aerial navigation, of the time when man might at last gratify that desire that has probably been latent in every human breast since the first man witnessed the graceful flight of the bird. He said to me that in his opinion it was merely a question of commercial demand, and added: “Do you know what today is the most certain road to profit for the inventor? If, he invents anything that is to augment the comfort of men, there is toil, trouble, worry, and, in nine cases out of ten, failure before him. The thing on which he can certainly succeed,

the thing for which he can immediately get money, is to invent something that will destroy life and property a little quicker, and the governments of the world will make haste to pay him any price for it.”

A few weeks ago: I walked one morning down the Avenue Du Grand Armee in Paris. A French regiment of the line was marching up the avenue, with fife and drum corps at their head. As that regiment moved along I was about the only one who turned my head to look at it. The people of the city seemed to pay no attention whatever to it, so used are they to the sight of soldiers, so used are they to this thing of taking men in the prime of life, from their families, from their occupations, and turning them into mere killing machines.

Against these great armaments, against this idea that war is a necessary thing, this meeting is a protest. And such protest is needed. Even in the churches, men preach peace in words, but glorify war in their hearts! In Windsor Castle is a room prepared at the expense of millions of dollars of our money by the present Queen of England, as one of the numerous testimonials to her love for her deceased husband. In that magnificent room, lined with polished marble, lies an effigy of Prince Albert on a marble couch of state. He is clad from neck to heel in the armor of a warrior, and the couch is supported by carvings of the Passion of Christ—the agony, the bloody sweat, the crucifixion, the descent, and the burial. This is typical of much of our Christianity. The very Prince of Peace—He whose mission it was to preach good will among men, to teach that the sword might be beaten into the ploughshare, and the spear into the pruning-hook—His name and His effigy are used to support the state of kings, to glorify the spirit that sends men by the millions to the grave before their time, that leaves women desolate and widowed at home. It ought to be ours to protest against this spirit. It ought to be ours, not merely as individuals, but as a nation.

What is the glory of this flag? What are the benefits that the Union it symbolizes confers upon us? Is not its chief benefit the peace that exists between so many sovereign States; that from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the Lakes to the Gulf, there is no dividing line guarded by sentinels and dotted with custom houses to interfere with free exchange? Sixty-five millions of people on the temperate zone of a great continent. Sixty-five millions of people with higher intelligence and education than exists among

any other people on earth today, with no war-like neighbors of superior strength or feeling of enmity, with none of the old world hatreds, with none of the fierce passions which array the nations of Europe against each other. This ought to be the nation of nations to lead the world in peace. Yet look at our paltry attempts to imitate the navies of Europe. Look at us keeping a standing army for which we have no use whatever, in the time of peace. There is no need of a standing army or of a standing navy. Too strong to fear injustice from any nation on earth, we ought to be too great to do it.

The remark of Professor Gardner, who said this morning that the “external is but the outward sign and manifestation of the internal,” that war exists on the earth today, and the energies of nations are spent in devising means of destruction because the inward spirit is warlike, is true. It is true even in this republic. Have we as yet learned the lesson that the interests of mankind are interwoven so that each is dependent on the other? Have we yet learned the great lesson that we can attain our own comfort and our own profit by promoting the comfort and profit of others? Why, look at this American Republic. From one border to the other, Americans can freely trade with Americans; but when you arrive at the national line, there you will find a custom-house officer to prevent Americans from trading with Canadians, or Europeans, or Mexicans. Consider the pettiness of this great nation of sixty-five millions of people, degrading itself with the idea that it needs a “baby act” to prevent American industries from being ruined by the pauper labor of Europe. And we are going from bad to worse. We are beginning to look askance at men who come here wanting to work, when, a few years ago, as you older people will remember, we welcomed them. But today we are beginning to think and act as though there were too many people in this country.

I drove yesterday afternoon with a friend of mine along the road between Dobbs Ferry and Tarrytown, and he told me that on this road were the summer houses of sixty millionaires. Their aggregate wealth is estimated at from \$500,000,000 to \$1,000,000,000. What is the complement of such monstrous wealth as that? It is the tramp and the pauper. Wealth is produced by labor; and when a few men can gather to themselves such accumulations of the products of labor, other men by thousands and millions must go without the things that their labor produces. Where there is such monstrous wealth on the one hand there must be deep poverty on the other. Out of such

monstrous inequality as we see being developed here, must come war. When Christ was born the civilized world was hushed in the Roman peace. Not a true peace, but a peace maintained by the mailed hands of the legions. But underneath that peace was the spirit of oppression, and oppression always means war.

Great estates were growing then in Italy, as they are growing today in the Republic of the West, Slavery existed, and was increasing, and, ground down by taxation, and eaten out by mortgages, the tillers of the soil were passing into tenants and into mere day laborers, and Rome, seemingly secure from outside danger, was rotting at the heart. Then came corruption, violence, civil war, the decline of civilization, till the barbarians, bursting through the circle that seemed once so strong, found but a shell. If within our Republic this aggregation of wealth goes on, this monstrous power on the one hand, this monstrous poverty on the other, the time must come as it came to the civilization of old, when the flames of temple and museum and college will light men to destruction.

He who would insure peace, aye, he who would bring peace in its full, true meaning—must look deeper than to arbitration between nations; he must endeavor to build the very foundations of the State upon the firm rock of justice. War comes from injustice; peace comes for justice; from the securing to each man of his right; from the giving to each of that which is his due. Now, look at the world today. Look over even this new Republic of the West. What do we find? Thousands and thousands of men and women laboring hard and long for a mere pittance, for merely enough to live on, the great body of the people finding it a strain and a struggle to merely live. With all our advantages, with all our advances, the growing intensity in the struggle for existence is everywhere showing itself in the increase of suicides, in the increase of lunatic asylums and of their inmates, in the arraying against each other of industrial classes. The industrial wars called strikes and lock-outs are only somewhat less disastrous than the wars of hostile armies, and the growing ill-feeling manifested in our industrial life is passing into legislation and into our party politics.

If we would really have peace and the prosperity that is born of true peace, let us study these industrial problems, let us discover the cause of the

bitter competition that is everywhere felt. If there are too many people in the country, what is the reason of it? Is it the niggardliness of the Creator? Has he made the mistake of bringing more people into the world than He has made provision for? No one can look around the world today and say that this is so. Whoever looks must say, it is not so. There is more than enough for all. If all do not have enough, it is not because enough has not been provided by the Creator, but because so much of what has been provided, is, in our greed and bad management, wasted.

Look over the Illinois coalfields today. American citizens who would like to be at work are starving. They are only kept alive by the contributions of charity that have been pouring in. These coal miners have had a difficulty with their employers. The employers have shut down their mines and refused to employ them; the consequence is they are starving. There is a wrong somewhere. Where is it? Nothing is more certain than that no man has any right to insist that another shall employ him, unless it be that every man has the right to employ himself. Each man has that right. Here is the wrong. There is a natural right that men do not enjoy today, and that is a right to employ those opportunities that the Creator made for their employment. There is no law, and there ought to be no law, that would compel those coal operators to employ men they do not want to employ or to pay them more wages than they choose to pay them. The injustice is not there; the injustice is in the laws which prevent those men from employing their own labor; that compel them to go to their employer and get his wages, and to accept his employment, or else stand idle.

In Illinois and Pennsylvania there is no scarcity of coal. Why, the mines that are worked are as nothing to the coal land that remains to work. Go into Pennsylvania, where the coal has been long worked. There you will find around the mines great stretches of land, under which are millions and millions of tons of coal. There it lies; no one is using it. If the coal miners do not want to work for their employers, or the employers do not want to employ the coal miners, all right. But why should the man who wants to employ his own labor in digging out of the earth coal which was placed in the earth before man came upon the earth, why should he be prevented? Why should anyone come in and step between him and the natural opportunity that no one is using, and say, "No, you shall not dig out this coal; this coal is mine!" Here is the wrong; here is the bottom wrong; that is the root and cause of all these industrial troubles: the wrong that all over our civilized world today is the

cause of the monstrous inequality in the distribution of wealth.

What are we? Science answers that we are land animals, living on land and from land, and only capable of life as we can obtain access to land. Religion answers that we are the equal children of a common Father, who prepared this world through long ages for our temporary sojourn, for a passing phase in our existence. Prepared it, not for any one man, or any generation of men, but for the countless generations that, in His providence, follow each other upon it. Take the answer of science or the answer of religion, and is it not obvious that we are all here with equal rights to the use of the earth? Is it not obvious that we are all here, not with the right to claim equal conditions, not with the right to say to another man, because you have more than I, you must give up a part of it to me; but with the right to the equal use of natural opportunities? The equal right to exert our labor, as nature—or, as I prefer to say, the Creator—has intended we should exert it? With the equal right to enjoy the products of our labor? And yet today, in our civilized countries, in this new country of ours, as well as in older ones, the majority of the people are but tenants at the will of other human creatures.

If you would know the cause that has produced the gaunt misery of Ireland, the cause that in England has built up one enormously rich class and crowded great masses of the people into the poorhouses, or laborers' cottages; if you would know the reason why, with our growth, the same monstrous inequalities are developing, you have but to look to the fact that while men are land animals, while it is only on the land and from the land that they can live; or produce, yet in these civilized Countries the great mass come into existence without any legal right whatever to as much of the soil of the earth as they can plant the soles of their feet upon.

Look at those coal fields of Pennsylvania and Illinois! Consider what coal is! Science tells us that it is stored-up sunshine, the light of the sun that streamed down upon this little globe for ages and ages before man appeared, gathered up by the tropical vegetation that then prevailed, changed by the processes of Nature into coal.

Religion tells us that it is stored-up light, heat, and power, prepared by that Intelligence that she looks to as the First Cause of all things, placed there by the workings of His physical laws there in the ground, that it might be ready

when the creature came that should know how to unlock it, to furnish man with light, heat, and power as he wished. Whom was the coal put here for? There can be but one answer—for man! Not some particular man: not Mr. Coxe, nor Mr. Pardee, nor the Philadelphia & Reading Coal Co., nor the Lehigh Coal & Navigation Co., but the use of man. Yet we make it by our laws the private and exclusive property of some particular man or men so they can warn off other men. So that they can say to the laborer: “You cannot exert your labor upon these opportunities for labor unless you pay toll to us.”

Look over all our industries; look over the civilized world today and in this wrong you will see the great cause that must, if suffered to go on, beat plowshares into swords, and pruning hooks into spears, as it has over and over again.

Where shall we find the remedy? We must if we would seek any remedy go to first principles, to the natural laws. It is clear that if we are all here with the equal permission of the Creator, we are all here with equal rights to the use of natural elements: to heat, to light, to the sea, to the land.

Now, if the right of any man must always be measured by equal rights of other men, how shall we carry out that principle? For there is another principle that we must clearly keep in mind. It is this: That security in the possession of land is necessary to the exertion of labor and the best use of labor. No one would spend the labor and capital necessary to open a mine if, when he had opened it, anyone could say: “I have just as good a right to it as you; therefore, I propose to work this mine.” No one would cultivate a farm if, when he had improved it, anyone could come up to him and say: “This is as much mine as yours.” No one would build a house, erect a factory, or make any permanent improvement, unless guaranteed that he should have possession of the land on which it stood. Nor yet is it necessary that to acknowledge the equal rights of men in land we divide up the land equally. Only a fool would think of such a thing as that.

What is necessary is this: That we should allow men possession on equal terms. That if coal land, for instance, is to be held by individuals, or by companies, they shall pay to the community a fair return for the exclusive privilege in that way granted to them. On that principle we can so use natural opportunities that all will be placed upon an equal level. How? Let me show you how.

Let us commence at another point, we will come out at the same place. There is a right of property, and it is from the violation of that right of prop-

erty that since the beginning of the world wars have sprung. Go to the bottom of all the wars of history; you will see that they spring from the effort on the part of some people to compel others to work for them without paying them for it. Now, that is a violation of a sacred right, of that right of property that is before all human laws; the right of property that existed before the first king reigned or the first legislature met. It is a right which rests upon the right of the individual to himself, to use his own powers and profit by his own exertions. That which any man produces belongs to him by natural right, and him alone. That which a man brings forth, that is his, and is his against all the world: his to use, his to give, his to sell, his to bequeath, his to do what he pleases with, so long, of course, as he does not in that use violate the right of anyone else. It is his by the highest title man can have—the title of production.

We talk of making things. But when we speak thus we speak inexactly. All man can do is to bring forth, to produce from Nature, not to create. We produce grain by putting in seed and leaving it to germinate; we produce houses by bringing together material and putting it in the shape and form of houses.

So we produce all wealth, and the labor which thus produces or brings forth gives a clear and exclusive title to the thing produced so long as it retains the form labor has impressed upon it. When it ceases to do that it passes from man's possession, and by what we call decay or rust, returns to its original shape, the reservoirs from which it was taken. It is in this way that all wealth is produced.

Under our present system, if you have added wealth to the community you are taxed or fined so much, and the more and better animals you get, the larger and finer houses and barns you build, the more wealth of any kind you produce or accumulate, the more you are taxed for it. Is not that a violation of the right of property? Take the American farmer today, and in taking the American farmer, mark you, you are taking the class that lies at the basis of the whole social structure. It was not manufacturers who came here first to settle the country; it was not doctors, lawyers, clergymen, or newspaper men — it was farmers.

And so it must always be that those who apply their labor directly to the extraction of wealth from the soil, they are the stratum upon which all others rest. And thus it is that the condition of the agriculturist, the man who applies labor directly to Nature, measures and fixes the condition of all other classes.

People sometimes talk about the labor problem as if it were a problem relating merely to manufacturers, or to the laborers of cities. It is a problem which has its roots in the condition of the farming class. Show me a country in which there are no tramps, in which there are no labor conflicts, in which there is no labor problem. Nothing can be done to settle the labor question without going down to the farming community. Take the American farmer today. What is he? A man who produces wealth from the soil. You know the old adage: "The farmer feedeth all." The more wealth the farmer produces the richer the country is, the more opportunity there is for all other classes to find employment. Now, what under our system happens to the American farmer? Why, every effort of his to produce wealth is met by a fine.

I went through this country two years ago: I met traveling on the cars, two railroad men. One of them was telling about an acquaintance of theirs; another railroad workman. He got himself a little piece of ground and put up a house; when he got his house built, along came the assessor and taxed him, not only taxed him on the house, but taxed him a good deal heavier on the ground than the man from whom he bought it was taxed on similar lots he still held vacant. Not taking the hint, this industrious man in his spare time went to work and made a fine veranda, or stoop. Along came the assessor again and added again to his taxes, fined him for putting up the stoop. What is that but a discouragement to industry—a legal violation of the right of property?

A farmer in an adjoining county told me how he had painted his house and barn that year; and along came the assessor and added \$500.00 to his assessment; really punished him for having painted his house and barn. Was not this a violation of the rights of property? Was it not against good public policy? What harm did the farmer do anybody in painting his house and barn? Instead of doing harm, the painting of the house and barn has been a source of pleasure to all who went along and looked at it. Is it not more agreeable to the eye to pass a neatly painted house and barn than to pass rude, unpainted shanties? So, as you know, it is throughout; the more wealth he produces, the more the farmer is taxed for it.

Not merely that, but almost everything that he has to buy he pays heavy taxes on, not directly, to the government tax gatherer; it would be a great deal better, a great deal cheaper if he did. But he pays them to the storekeeper in added prices. Look at this item of sugar; something we must all use. We Americans have a sweet tooth in our heads and want a good deal of sugar.

And we need it moreover for the curing or preserving of many things the farmers raise. Sugar in Great Britain has been about one-half the price it is here. What is the reason? Simply taxation; simply that the government calls upon us to pay two prices for sugar in order, ostensibly, to benefit sugar planters down in Louisiana. or Mr. Spreckles in the Sandwich Islands. What is that but legalized robbery! On every lump of sugar you put in a cup of tea you are robbed. And so it is with everything else the farmer buys; his lumber, his nails, his plows, his tools, his clothes: on everything, in short, he has to buy, he pays enormous additional prices, because of what is called “protection to American industry.”

Where does the farmers’ share of that protection come in? What is there that he grows that is increased in price by “protection?” Why is this enormous weight of taxation pressing on the class that are engaged in producing wealth permitted to exist? Is it right? Is it wise? Is it expedient? On the contrary, it is impoverishing the nation; on the contrary, it is degrading labor; on the contrary, it is making thousands and thousands of tramps and paupers and a “baker’s dozen” of great millionaires. On the contrary, it is fostering a spirit of greed; and that is the spirit of war.

But it will be said the government wants taxation. Yes, the government wants revenue, but there is a good deal easier and better way of getting it than by taxing industry. If we must have taxes at all, they ought to be direct taxes; they ought to be taxes that would not be increased by every hand they pass through; for, mark you, when an importer pays duty on sugar, on cloth, on iron, what he adds to the price when he sells is not merely the duty; it is profit upon what he has paid for duty as well as on what he has paid for the things. And so by every hand through which they pass, these taxes are increased and multiplied.

If we must resort to taxation it ought to be taxation that falls on all in proportion to their means, but not in proportion to their needs; our system of taxation taxes men for getting married; for having children; it taxes men for endeavoring to keep families in comfort. You estimate the proportion of his income that the American farmer pays in taxation and then if you can, estimate the proportion that one of our great millionaires pays.

Look at even those taxes that are levied ostensibly, as the great masses of the people think, for the purpose of getting at the rich man—taxes on capital. Do you know the farming districts pay more of these taxes proportionally than do the great cities? The reason of it is very plain. Here is a farmer. He

makes perhaps by hard industry a few thousand dollars. All his neighbors know of it. He buys himself a fine watch and a fine carriage. Everybody knows of it. He buys better cattle, and puts better furniture in his house. The neighbors know of it. The tax assessor can see his plows and implements, and his house, and what he has in it, and can fix his wealth. The farmer hasn't got a great deal of it; not enough to lie about. Not enough to bribe a little for, and so the weight of such taxation falls on him.

Now, look at a great millionaire, living in a big city, where no one knows his neighbor. How are you going to find how much he is worth? How can you tell whether he is worth a few thousand or many millions? And this man has enough to take means to get easily rid of the tax gatherer. You know Vanderbilt paid taxes on a million just because he might as well pay something to keep people quiet. That is about the principle on which every rich man pays. If we must raise government revenue by taxation, we ought to devise some system of direct taxation, some system to get at the means the man has.

But there is no reason for any system of taxation that takes from men what properly belongs to them. If you will look into the laws of this universe, you will find them harmonious: the deeper you go, the closer you look, the more will multiply upon your mind the evidences of a wise Creator—the evidence of intelligent adaptation of means to ends. And in our civilized society we have not passed beyond the foresight of the intelligence to which the universe testifies. The locomotive is in one sense as natural a thing as the bird or the animal. The Creator made those laws by which the intelligence of man brings forth adaptations that enable him to travel swifter than any animal. So our cities, or vast commerce, all that we call civilization must have been foreseen.

And in the beginning, it seems to me clear that it was foreseen that communities would need public revenue; that as mankind advanced in civilization, that is, in the art of living peaceably, common needs would increase and multiply. Now, there is a way, a natural way, to provide revenues for the needed purposes of government, without taxing anyone for producing wealth, without taking from the production of the labor of anyone, without furnishing such incentives to fraud, perjury, and corruption. Look at great cities as they arise. Do you not always see as they arise an enormous increase in the value of land? Whom ought that value belong to? Come down with me to New York. Those buildings you see there, they are the products of individual exertion; they represent labor; they properly belong to the men who erected

them, or the men who got them by purchase or gift from those who did erect them.

But the land on which these buildings rest, where does its value come from? Take the value today of New York City; of the bare land on-which the buildings in New York rest. It will run way up in the hundreds or thousands of millions. To what is that great value due? Is it due to the exertion of the particular men who own the lots, or to the great population of the city, to the fact that New York is the center of exchanges for the whole state, and to some extent the whole country? So, in Pennsylvania you will find coal lands worth thousands and thousands of dollars an acre. What made them valuable? The man who owns them? Owning creates no value. They are valuable because of the increased population that needs coal. These land values are values that grow with the growth of the whole people and therefore ought to be taken for the use of the whole people.

The way to secure equality and to do justice is to abolish all the taxes we now levy on men for building houses, raising stock, erecting machinery, importing goods or increasing wealth in any way, and to put our taxes on the value of land. Mark you, not on the value of the improvements of land, but on the value of land itself—the value that is added by the growth of population, not the value that is added by labor. If we take land values to defray expenses of the whole community the burden may be lifted from labor.

Thus, every man may improve, may build, may grow as much as he wishes, without fear of being fined for it. He may exchange freely with his fellows—the people of the world, without any customhouse officer coming between to demand one-half or three-quarters of all he has got in exchange as penalty for having traded. Do that, and you take away the temptation that leads men to monopolize natural opportunities and, in a world in which they have but a few years to stay, play the part of the “dog in the manger:” It is because of this monopolization that the country seems too small today, not because we have too many people. Even in the present stage of the arts, the area of the United States could support 1,000,000,000 people instead of the 65,000,000 we now have.

The system that we propose, and is called the “single tax:’ is really not a tax at all. It is not exaction; it is simply a taking for the community that value which belongs to the community. I cannot, in a speech of this length, go over the whole subject and meet the objections that will arise in minds who entertain it for the first time, but this you can see, that this plan would take taxes

off of the farm and put them on the speculator. Examine the statistics and you will see that the proposition, if carried into effect, would lessen greatly what the farming districts have to pay. But it does not need statistics. You can see that in all the direct and indirect taxes that fall on things produced by labor, you pay here just as much tax as is paid in New York.

But put taxes on the value of land, and where would they be heaviest, on districts like this about us here, or in the great cities? Why, a great part of the farming land in this country has no value at all beyond its improvements, save the speculative value. Not so with the land values in great cities and mineral districts. To take taxes off of the products of labor and put them on the products of land, would lift the taxes from the farming communities and make the great cities pay the larger share. Why should they not? What would the land in New York City be worth if Manhattan Island was to remain anchored and the rest of the continent float away? What we propose is simply to do to all equal and exact justice; to give to commerce, to exchange, to all the forces of production free and unfettered play, and to recognize the equal right of all to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is in the extension of these principles that at last the world will find peace.