

Georgism and the Bourgeois Spirit

By ROBERT C. LUDLOW

If there is any prediction about the outcome of this war that can be made with certainty, it is this: that the bourgeois has had his day, and it is gone. The bourgeois revolution—the liberalism of the eighteen and nineteen hundreds—has been short lived, as time goes, and the coldness shed over the earth is breaking up in the heat of blood. It was a revolution, if by that we mean a change, but it was not a radical revolution as far as the masses were concerned, for under the bourgeoisie a slavery of status gave way to a slavery of contract—that change was a gradual one, originating probably in the crusades, when the capitalist spirit made its timid show, to be strengthened in the theology of the sixteenth century reformers and to be canonized in the economic texts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The bourgeois revolution was a failure from the start, for though it wrested political power from the landed aristocracy it left the landowner in undisturbed ownership of the land—and, as long as that remained, and as long as economic rent reverted to the owner, he was not too concerned about the political power wielded by the bourgeois. So that the revolution neither freed the capitalist from the economic hold of the landlord nor lessened the plight of the masses. Far from it! For now the masses must pay tribute to the landowner as before and be enslaved to the capitalists who, by acquiring ownership of the means of production, left to the masses only their labor which must now be bought and sold, bought cheaply and sold dearly—and so the ignominy of proletarianism descended on the exploited.

To the bourgeois, as to anyone else living within a system, his mode of life and thought seems eminently reasonable, eminently moderate, eminently just. He is above all respectable—he is constantly occupied with

his business and insists that his neighbors do likewise. He is a decent man and no cad. He is moderate, for moderation pays dividends. And then he is kind—to the wife and kiddies, to the canary and the cat and the guy next door. He is a great joiner—he belongs to the Rotary Club, the Epworth League or the Holy Name Society. And he is religious—teaches Sunday School, joins up with the Y.M.C.A. or the Knights of Columbus, looks favorably on the clergy as pleasant chaps always ready to give an encouraging slap on the back and moderate in their views and not too ready to interfere in matters they had best keep out of.

The bourgeois is clean, takes a shower daily, keeps well laundered, finger nails cut, deodorized breath, neat home, neat wife, neat lawn, neat kids. To the bourgeois life is business in day, the comforts of the fireside at night, and security, steady dividends, a spree now and then, but in moderation. When he goes to work he wants to pass by a Safeway market and a People's Drug Store and a Post Office and a Bank. That's how he wants it to be—that's America to him and that's what he's fighting to keep. He doesn't begrudge the other fellow a chance—wants life to allow the other fellow to pull up from the ranks; that's competition and competition is a good word and the basis of democracy and of the America he knows.

As to the mental processes of the bourgeois—they are none too lucid. It is true there are some things he definitely accepts—the necessity of order, the sacredness of personal property, the value of religion as a prop to the status quo, and moderation, always moderation. Beyond these things he is none too sure of himself. A college graduate (education pays dividends) he has been exposed to a few or a great many ideas. But he never makes his mind up on first principles and his moder-

ation forbids that he identify himself with a cause. He is religious but none too sure about the objective reality of what he professes—but he delays or avoids an examination of fundamentals because it might disturb the routine of life, or trouble his conscience, or upset the status quo. *Good*

And that, in brief, is bourgeois man, the creator or the product, as you will, of capitalist democracy. That is the brave bourgeois revolutionist and that is the man whose grave is already dug and waiting and into which this blood bath of the 40's will push him.

Of what relevance then is all this to the Georgist? It is simply this: That in some quarters the Georgist cause has become hopelessly encased in a bourgeois setting. The revolutionary implications of Georgism have been obscured and the movement has become respectable!! We do not sully our hands in politics, we do no works of mercy in the slums, we leave that (as comfortable bourgeoisie) to the professional charities. We are not to be found in the picket lines, nor do we waste time protesting the treatment of an Odell Waller, or a Connor, Ramsay, and King—we have no Sacco or Vanzetti. *So?*

We have become sterile—in our mad worship of logic we have falsified the nature of man and built up a movement with no dynamism, no revolutionary enthusiasm. We are overflowed with business men, solid Rotarians, Sunday School teachers, and quasi-economists. Many of our publications read like manifestos of the National Association of Manufacturers. We are convinced of the sanctity of private property. To use Newman's epithet of the Oriental Room, we stink of logic. Has Georgism become so settled in the framework of capitalism that it too must be swept away with the bourgeoisie? *bad*

While Henry George was steeped in the ideology of the classical eco-

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nomics his sympathies were proletarian. He built up a system utilizing the principles of the classical school, some of them valid, no doubt, but many incapable of proof (for example, how do we know the desires of man are unlimited?). Unfortunately the acquisitive nature of man became stressed and production for profit considered preferable to production for use. But it must be remembered that by the time we get through abstracting the elements from the term capitalism which George considered not to be included in the connotation of the term we have very little left to resemble what we know, historically, as capitalism. So that under a Georgist regime capitalism, as we know it, would be no more. And the economy of scarcity which characterizes the capitalist system and the farciful production of superfluities to the neglect of necessities would most certainly be frowned upon by those imbued with the radicalism of Henry George.

Most psychologists are agreed that man has in him a will to power and a will to community. Economists also realize this and according as they give prominence to one or the other so their systems are either built on

the acquisitive, competitive nature of man, or on the social cooperative nature. Those of the classical school (and "orthodox" Georgists) say this: that, after all, they are the realists, that man is acquisitive, that since this is so it is best we utilize his will to power by making it the base of an economic system which claims that, by following our own self interest, we (in the long run), insure the communal good.

But why this? Why the necessity of using the will to power as the basis of our economy and thus encouraging the introvert tendencies of man? Is not there also the will to community? And is there any real reason why the ego should not be sublimated into a societal economy? Or are we still contending over that farcial argument of planned or unplanned economies?

pointless **V**-bell

Toward the establishment of a cooperative economy! That should be the watchword of those who see in this deluge the downfall of economic liberalism. And of our own hearts? Well, from them we must tear the last vestiges of the bourgeois spirit!

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