

### Faith and Patriotism

"But we have not fully trusted her."

News dispatches in August quoted Attorney General Biddle as saying that while a certain large oil company may have been guilty of infringing certain monopoly laws, there was no reason to believe that the company had been guilty of any unpatriotic deals. The Attorney General's statement referred to the charge that agreements had been made with an enemy country in exchange for patent rights.

The incident furnishes an example of the loose way in which the word "patriotic" is being used today. The dictionary defines the word as meaning "devoted to the welfare of one's country; directed to the public safety and welfare." Most Georgists will disagree with the Attorney General. The mere infringement of monopoly laws is a serious and unpatriotic deed. It is obviously an action directed against public welfare.

At the same time there is much agitation for the suspension of anti-trust and similar laws, and for the dismissal of cases of that nature now pending, all ostensibly in the interests of national unity during the emergency. It is held to be unpatriotic to expend effort in these critical times upon such trivial matters as monopolies, trusts, vested interests and political privileges.

Georgists, however, have a much higher conception of patriotism than this, which permits selfish interests to act against the general welfare when they wrap themselves in the flag. The age in which we live is an unhappy one. What we need most urgently is a sense of direction, the faith that in teaching the philosophy of moral progress through freedom we are indeed taking the most patriotic action within our power.

No progressive movement can afford to stand still, for its very stagnation will deny it any effectiveness in a changing world, a world in which new ideologies may necessitate new tactics. This does not mean that expediency should rule, for any compromise with principle tends to a complete negation of the total structure of the premise, logic and validity of the conclusions of a philosophy. Rather, it should be an alertness as to new approaches and, as the movement grows, a display by the leading elements in that movement of an implicit faith in its objectives and the righteousness of its cause. Neither objective is being met by Georgists today.

In analyzing these shortcomings it may be well to examine more closely certain fundamentals, lest an oversight in a premise or an oversimplification born out of habitual usage should thwart the effort to find better methods of teaching how the free society which Henry George visualized is to be brought about. Failure to do this now in the rapidly changing environment of a war-torn world,

may cause the complete disintegration of the Georgist movement. There is no defeatism in Georgism, but our strength lies in clear and fearless thinking, freshly interrogating even accepted principles, following truth wherever it may lead.

The writer offers these themes for consideration.

(1) The impact of this war threatens to break the Georgist movement, as has happened before in similar times of stress. It may be wise at this time, therefore, to sit back and concentrate on the making of better teachers. This would entail work on better methods of presentation, the preparation of additional and more inclusive courses, etc. The names of Adam Smith, Ricardo, Mill, the Physiocrats and many others come to mind; people with whose works many Georgists are but barely familiar. In short we should prepare the heavy ammunition for the time when the war is over. It seems doubtful whether much headway can be made under prevailing conditions, with many teachers and students joining the armed forces, and the civilian population busy with First Aid, Air Raid Warden duty and other volunteer war work, not to mention the strain under which everyone lives. "They also serve who only stand and wait," and in keeping the philosophy alive and without compromise, while developing a larger body of first class teachers, we may well make the greatest contribution possible to the movement.

(2) "A civilization like ours must either advance or go back," says Henry George. "The earth is the tomb of dead empires no less than of dead men." In *Progress and Poverty* he showed how OUR civilization may decline, lest we stop its internal decay before the time when "in the festering masses will be generated volcanic forces, which shatter and rend when seeming accident give them vent . . . and in carnivals of destruction brute force and wild frenzy will alternate with the lethargy of a declining civilization." Are we taking his book seriously? Are we meeting the challenge?

The motor of human progress is human power, limited by the amount of effort expended in securing a living. Thus, as inequality progresses, as the struggle for a bare existence becomes more intense and it becomes harder to find a job, the desire for security will gradually replace the desire for opportunity, the worker will become more dependent upon the existing system, and with senses dulled adjustment will be made. "The advance of inequality necessarily brings improvements to a halt, and . . . draws even upon the mental power necessary for maintenance, and retrogression begins." This is the challenge of our times and failure to meet it means resignation to inevitable failure.

Too many Georgists today consider that the whole vast problem of life will

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be completely solved once economic rent is collected by the community. The first result of that panacea-mongering is to antagonize every other group working for some reform or other. There is no reason why we should not have cooperatives under Georgism, or a credit-plan, or a consumers-union, or a labor union. As a matter of fact, these will fare much better and take their proper place, once the problem of finding work for their members is no longer a throttling force.

Ours is not the only reform or revolutionary movement, and in bluntly antagonizing every other, we are simply working against ourselves. On the moral and religious side the picture is as bad. As Mr. Ludlow wrote in the July Freeman, "We have become sterile in our mad worship of logic; we have falsified the nature of man and built up a movement without dynamism, or revolutionary enthusiasm." A friend emphasized this to me recently: "You consider only the fact that there are landowners; you disregard completely that everybody who is not a landowner would like to be one, and as long as there is a chance and their moral outlook is unchanged Georgism will fail."

Considering the inevitable moral deterioration resulting from the advance of inequality, where will our answer lie? Can we just go on educating more and more people, or will there be a time when more and more people will refuse to be educated? And what of faith, the great and unshaken faith in freedom? Will that be the answer?

Georgism is not dead, nor has the chaos of anarchy overtaken our American society. And yet, who would deny that the powers of darkness are at work? "He who will hear, to him the clarions of the battle call." It is time to awaken from our lethargy, it is time to prepare for the decisive battle of ideologies that must come sooner or later. Some of us are fighting now with the armed forces, and in so doing will defeat any threat of armed invasion, for we doubt not our victory in battle. But Georgism will not come about by itself, and unless we are prepared for the greater struggle to follow, the forces of totalitarianism may well win out, freedom once more become unknown and the all-dominant State grow invincible. Dear empires testify . . . .

First and foremost the call is for better educational methods. The will to knowledge must come from within, although it should be strongly encouraged by those entrusted with the administration of the school and its extensions. Honest differences of opinion, unless they violate fundamental principles of the philosophy, are valuable and cannot be suppressed in a group advocating freedom. By equal right, no pressure from without must shake the faith that is Georgism, the knowledge that in spreading the philosophy of moral progress

through freedom we are serving our country, are serving mankind. The responsibility is ours and its weight is heavy. When words are not heard, our lives for a cause may bear the testimony. When people become dulled by environmental forces to the complicated structure of slow and painful education, let our faith in freedom and patriotism inspire them.

Much has been left unsaid that should have been said. As it is, these are serious themes for your consideration which to the writer seem most challenging.

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