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When War Comes

A recent citizen of Austria said to me: "I am a Georgist. I believe in free trade. But I disagree with your statement that free trade would prevent Germany from going to war. I have lived with Germans, and I tell you these people are different from other people. They are inherently different. They don't understand or want freedom. Their nature is to be both subservient and dominating. They crave war."

He had suffered from Nazi terrorism so much that he completely forgot the Germany that was Schiller and Heine and Lessing and Goethe. The brutishness which as a Georgist he should know is the product of Nazi environment, he ascribed to the "nature" of Germans, because his reason was thrown out of balance by the bitterness of his experiences with this environment. He, too was a product of it.

Ever the "chosen people" has as its counterpart the "barbarian". The slaying of non-believers was sanctioned by Jehovah. The helenes proudly scorned all who dwelt outside the peninsular. Not to be a Roman was to be a slave. The self-assumed halo of Marxists casts a shadow on the human qualities of all who do not accept that faith. And to the aryan—which, undefinable, merely means in practice "our mob"—the shedding of blood in the name of "race purity" is sanctified murder. Power makes rulers drunk; poverty makes their peoples mad.

I remember 1914. I remember how we hated the Huns. Everybody was either pro or anti. A sane position did not seem possible, so

virulent were the hatreds aroused by the propagandist methods employed by European agents in this country. One recalls with a wry smile the bitterness aroused in those days by "atrocities" stories—since then revealed as propagandist fiction.

We rationalized our emotions, of course. The Georgists, being fond of logic (but completely submerging in their passion the logic of their master) were quick to fortify their hysteria with the most specious arguments.

For instance, the group of Georgists with whom I sided said that while we opposed war in principle we nevertheless thought this war against Kaiserism was necessary. For, a successful Kaiser would destroy political democracy, and the cause of economic democracy would then be destroyed forever! Wilson's shibboleth made fools of us. How insidiously a nice-sounding phrase can rationalize the most idiotic passion. Of all people the Georgists should know that war is the steed upon which the monopolist rides to greater victories over the exploited; that war always results in a stronger government and a weaker people. As a result of the holocaust of 1914—1918 there is less democracy throughout the world than ever before. Could it have been any worse if the Kaiser had been "successful" against the Allies?

We all know now that Americans gained nothing from our participation in that crazy affair except a huge debt-yoke, an increasingly burdensome pension system, more bureaucracy and less democracy—

to say nothing of the human suffering involved. But did we know that in 1917? Then we knew only that we were making the world "safe for democracy". How we hated the Germans and all things German! Sauerkraut was eaten under the pseudonym of "victory cabbage." The study of the language of Kant and Schubert was "verboten" in our public schools. Eating places famous for their delectable German cuisine had to anglicize their names to retain patronage. As if sauerbraten and beer had any nationality!

Silly? We can say so now. But it won't be silly when the next war comes—as it will come soon, and again and again, as long as civilization rests on the volcano of economic maladjustment. And all our reasoning, all our logic, will vanish before the poison of hatred, injected into our marrow by the subtle propaganda of our masters. And those of us who try to retain some modicum of sanity will be scorned by our erstwhile friends, spit upon, persecuted, imprisoned. So bitter are the passions aroused by war that love, the most persistent of human emotions, weakens from the competition. The girls won't even dance with boys in civilian clothes.

We must steel ourselves for the inevitable. Every day we must repeat to ourselves, as a liturgy, the truth that war is caused by the conditions that bring about poverty; that no war is justified; that no war benefits the people; that war is an instrument whereby the haves increase their hold on the have-nots; that war destroys liberty. We must train our minds, as an athlete trains his body, against the inevitable conflict with the powerful propaganda that will be used to destroy our sanity. Now, before it is too late, we must learn to think peace in the midst of war.