

Henry Ford Talks

Advocates of free trade and the collection of economic rent by the state will be interested to learn that the views of Henry Ford, America's No. 1 pacifist and now its No. 1 munitions maker, on those important matters, are closely akin, as far as they go, to the views held by Henry George. This will be seen from the following condensation of an article in Liberty for September 5, written by DONALD WILHELM and reprinted here by permission.

* HE IS STILL a pacifist, a conscientious objector. He makes no bones about it. He views this war, like the last, as the greatest of catastrophes. He said: "I hate war. I've always hated war. . . . You can't get me to say anything in favor of war, except that it gives us experience." Nevertheless, today he is probably more feared by Mr. Schickelgruber and the Japs than any other American except the President.

Mr. Ford says it is the young people who will make the future. "Their lives haven't been messed up. They're honest. But they have to know how to do things, how to think and work. Education is the hardest job in the world, the way most people have to live, without land and nature to help. . . . Production is education. People who work are learning all the time. It's work that gives them character."

Money as such appears to mean little to him, who probably hasn't the remotest idea of how much he has. "Money isn't wealth," he said. "People are always confusing money with wealth. Production is the only way to create wealth. Money is necessary to organize businesses and keep homes running. It saves transportation when you want to exchange the work you've put into

raising a bushel of wheat, say, for the work some one else has put into making something, maybe a tool, in another part of the country. . . . Gold is about the most useless metal we have."

His formula: To make things in a big way, make them cheap. To make them cheap, cut costs. To cut costs, make many all alike, use machines to make them. To make it possible for people to buy them, pay the highest wages.

This formula was Mr. Ford's greatest contribution. He didn't invent mass production, but he was the first to make it work in a big way. He has lived to see it adopted by countless makers of other things, to see it multiply and cheapen the things on sale, to change our way of life and living, become basic to our success in war.

This idea of his was at first deemed crazy. His partners quit him. Manufacturers here in the land of the free and brave went through the ceiling, came down hopping mad, when in 1914 he established five dollars as his minimum daily wage and cut his working day from ten to eight hours. In 1922 he increased his minimum wage to six dollars. In 1928 he adopted the five-day week. In 1929, when his friend President Hoover was begging American employers not to lower wages, he increased his minimum wage to seven dollars, and he held to it until forced by hard times back to six dollars, now his minimum for every Ford employe, man or woman, old or young, including many who are physically handicapped.

While we rolled through his thousands of acres he shook his head each time I mentioned the war, but wanted to talk about the soil.

"We're raising soybeans here," he said. "The time will come when not an inch of the soil, not a single crop, not even weeds will be wasted. Then every American family can have a piece of land. We ought to tax all idle land the way Henry George said—tax it heavily so that it's owners would have to make it productive. . . . The family of every working man," he insists, "should have a piece of land."

A prime reason why he has never given a dollar to Detroit charities (his son, Edsel, makes up handsomely for him) is that public relief, as he sees it, prevents people from going back, or being driven back to the land. "Public relief," he said, "is the greatest curse that ever struck the earth. No one ever gets anything for nothing." His idea of being helpful is manifested in other ways. For example, years ago he had a study made of the percentage of people in the state of Michigan who had physical handicaps of any kind. Then he made places for a like percentage of physically handicapped men and women in his own employment—so many who were deaf, lame, one-legged or one-armed, so many with arrested cases of tuberculosis, and so on. Each, of course, receives full pay. And because of their special devotion to their work he believes they do their part well, often much better than others.

Even at seventy-nine, apparently the future interests him far more than the past, the present, or even the job

that his big empire is doing—making munitions of war. "There's no need of this country having hard times after peace comes, if we pull together and use our experience. . . . We can look forward to many of the most prosperous years we have ever had."

When reminded that a depression has followed every war, and that this war is destroying more wealth, whether measured in lives or in money, than all the wars of the past combined, he said, "If this war ended tomorrow there'd be a big gap to be filled. Right now there are shortages of many things people want, and the shortages are increasing. Even before we had to defend ourselves, you couldn't show me one man or woman who had plenty of everything. For every one with half enough I could show you many who didn't have the simplest essentials of decent living, like good food and shelter and education."

It is Mr. Ford's opinion that Americans were a lot better off, at that, than the people in other countries. Nature didn't distribute her gifts equally. We made out better than most. We lifted ourselves by our own bootstraps. We can do it again. "This country is too rich in its land and other resources, in inventive, scientific, and manufacturing skill," he insisted, "to go down. If the war goes on another year or two, there will be demand for all we can make. We'll have to help many other countries. The gap is getting bigger all the time. It will be up to industry to fill it.

"Production is the only way to have prosperity. I have been saying this for forty years. It was true then, it is true now. It will be true after the war." There isn't such a thing as overproduction, he agreed. The problem is to maintain purchasing power. "The first thing the country should do when peace comes is to issue currency in dollars to pay back to the people the money they have loaned the government. That money would provide purchasing power, keep industry going, provide jobs, until we get squared around."

"That idea, of working the printing presses to make more dollars, sure will make some people see red, Mr. Ford," it was suggested.

"Let 'em!" he answered. Then he added: "The dollar is good all over the world. That's because there is plenty to make it good. It's backed up by the government, by the people of the country, by their ability to work. It doesn't even need to be backed up by all that gold we've got buried underground. Use that, if you have to. It's no good where it is. Idle money never does any one any good. You've got to put it to work. There'll be plenty of work for it to do."

He looks upon our enormous wartime increase in industrial capacity as an asset, not a liability, especially if governments will refrain from erecting barriers to the free flow of goods. Noting that new industries have always been necessary to prosperity, he emphasized the future importance of aviation. "The generation before mine," he said, "gave us the railroads. My generation produced the automobile. Everybody will be flying after the war. There's always been a place in the world for

any new way to improve transportation and communication."

When told about a transcontinental trucker who expects big planes to carry one's household goods from coast to coast overnight, he said, "That's right."

"Take homes," he went on. "How many people have really decent homes? If we built new homes at the peak rate for six or seven years, we would still be way behind in the kind of homes that most people nowadays

want—the last word of economy in construction, care, heating, air conditioning, comforts and conveniences. Why not? . . . The only way to put such homes within the reach of millions of families is to use new kinds of material and make them, at least in large part, in factories working all the year around. This will mean a big new industry, a lot of work and jobs all over the country.

"It takes only a couple of new industries like aviation and housing to make a big difference. There'll be others."