

Can Georgism Bless War?

By RAYMOND HAMMOND

In considering the question posed in the title of this article, I should like to distinguish between Georgism and the individuals who make up the Georgist movement in much the same sense as one differentiates between Christianity and Christians. In this way I believe that it should be possible to arrive at a definite policy for Georgism in regard to war, while at the same time allowing for a diversity of belief and opinion among individual Georgists. With this in mind, let me amplify the question as follows: "Can Georgism give its blessing and support to the nation's war effort without doing violence to its principles?" If the answer is no, then it is clear that to do so would be hurtful, if not fatal, to the movement.

It is natural to turn to Henry George, himself, for light on this important and difficult question, but, inasmuch as he did not have to face the problem in its present form, it is dangerous to form a judgment on what his reaction would be. Anna George de Mille writing in the January Freeman says, "I am convinced his (George's) opinion would be that the physical aggression of totalitarian nations must be physically stopped." The quotations which she gives from A PERPLEXED PHILOSOPHER certainly seem to support this view. On the other hand, we find from a study of George's other books three general principles that point to an opposite view: 1. He believed war to spring from a violation of economic laws. 2. He distrusted armaments as a means of defense against attack and seemed to put his trust in a long-range program for peace with free trade as the keystone. 3. While an intensely patriotic American he did not believe the people of any other nation inherently vicious.

We must remember, however, that while the personal views of George would have undoubted weight they are not necessarily conclusive.

George did not originate the philosophy of moral progress through democratic freedom. He discovered economic laws already in existence and set them forth with great clarity. Great as George was and great as his work, the laws are greater.

I would not attempt to minimize the potency of the appeal to abandon the broad principles of peace in the face of the exigencies of the present moment. The appeal to patriotism, the appeal to freedom, the appeal to humanity, strike responsive chords in the socially sensitive soul of the Georgist. Then there is the practical appeal which a recent writer in *The Freeman* brought out, namely, that Georgism should go "all out" in order to get a seat at the peace table following the war.

But, deeper than all these urges to take up the sword, there comes a disquieting intuition affirming that war can never be an implement of the philosophy of ethical democracy; that the genius of Georgism is education.

Viewed in this light, the last thing Georgists should desire is a seat at the peace table. Georgism will never flower out of the hate, fear, and desire for revenge engendered by a military victory. No, it is only in time of peace that the seeds of the philosophy of freedom can germinate and take root.

We should especially scorn a seat at the peace table when the price of admission means a sacrifice of fundamental principles. War is a violation of personality. In spite of the fine phrases of the war-makers, in the last analysis the guns are turned against people not against ideas.

"To thine own self be true" is as good an axiom for maintaining the integrity of a cause or a movement as it is for an individual. The Nazis know how to make war. There is no conflict in their minds. It is easy for them to accept war as a solution. Believing as they do that oth-

er nations are responsible for their misery, their object is to destroy the offending nations.

The Communists know the art of moving the masses in political upheavals or violent revolt. It is easy for them to accept violence and bloodshed. Believing that a certain privileged class is responsible for their misery their object is to destroy it.

By the same token, it is impossible for Georgists to accept war as a means to an end because they know it is not a nation, not a class, but an institution that is responsible for human misery. And you can't fight an institution with bullets.

Many will say that this is all right for the long view but what about now. Our answer can only be that the long view is the only true view. This, I will grant, requires an act of faith. We must believe that "truth crushed to earth will rise again." As long as we believe that there are inexorable economic laws which are built into the structure of the universe, we need not fear that they will lose their potency or that those who persist in violating the laws will escape eventual destruction. What we do need to fear is that those who have these laws in their keeping will distort or pervert them for the sake of expediency.

I offer this as a war credo for Georgists: Georgism is dedicated to the principle that poverty is the root of war. Our answer to the problem of war, which is merely part of the larger problem of poverty, is the same in peace or war: education in true economic principles. If we resort to the use of force or violence in the course of our movement for a free society we would violate and therefore weaken an essential principle. Our battlefield is the human mind.

I recognize the right of Georgists to defend their country with arms, but they can never defend or propagate Georgism with any other weapon.

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on but education. If the philosophy of ethical democracy cannot live by education then it must die. But we know that because it is geared to eternal, inexorable, universal laws it will not die.*

*The editors of *The Freeman* welcome articles that controvert, by rational argument, the viewpoints of one or more, or even all, of them. *The Freeman* has a single inflexible rule of policy: to reflect the considered, rational viewpoints current among its contributors, which are consistent with the classic teachings of the Georgists who have enriched the literature of the movement.—The Editors.