

THE CRISIS CENTURY

by OSCAR B. JOHANNSEN

ALMOST from its very beginning, the Twentieth Century has been involved in one crisis after another—World War I, the Russian revolution, the depression, World War II, the Korean war, and today, revolutions or near revolutions all over the globe. The Cuban Crisis has literally set the whole world on edge for fear that it would erupt into a devastating nuclear war, while the fighting between China and India has created another serious emergency with no end in sight. Crisis follows crisis with bewildering speed, so many, in fact, that some day historians may well label this century, "The Crisis Century."

It would be easy to say that Communist Russia is responsible for these explosive disturbances. The U.S.S.R. certainly has played a part in stirring up trouble, but actually its Machiavelian machinations succeeded only because conditions were ripe for social upheavals. The seeds of unrest could never have sprouted if the soil had not been fertile, so the hope that the destruction of Soviet power will result in a return to sane, peaceful conditions is a vain one.

These eruptions are surface manifestations of the social and economic diseases plaguing the nations of the world. Most Georgists believe that the crises are due to the denial of the free access to land under conditions of equal opportunity for all, and they bemoan the fact that few appear to recognize this. It certainly appears that an unjust system of land tenure is at the root of most, if not all, of the recent upheavals. The revolution in Cuba was sparked by the hunger of the peasants for land; the Algerian rebels were primarily the landless; and the unrest in

Brazil is apparently the precursor of a fight which is brewing between the landless Gauchos and the landowners. Wherever you turn, if you look beneath the surface, you note the desperate hunger for land.

There is probably little doubt that basically the fundamental cause of these crises is the land problem. But since there are other causes, scientific precision requires that we be more circumspect in our claim. The weight of the evidence is such that we have a right to suspect that many of the difficulties confronting these nations have their roots in the treatment of the land and would probably disappear once this primary injustice was resolved.

It may be that some awareness of the land problem is nearer at hand than is generally realized. The fact that governmental reports of conditions in underdeveloped countries time and again point out that land must be made more easily available to the people may be a straw in the wind. House & Home's special issue and The Reader's Digest's forthright article on land speculation this past July may be clues that attention is slowly focusing on the land.

If this is so, however, Georgists must hardly expect that the millennium is at hand for we have to deal with men and not angels. It is a sad quirk of man that he never adopts sound ideas in their pure form. He always seems to hedge them with restrictions so that he never quite obtains the results anticipated. In implementing the principles of the Declaration of Independence, the Founding Fathers actually wrote a constitution which permitted slavery to exist. Because many of the concepts

of the Declaration were adopted the results attained in America were far superior to those in any other nation, but they were not what they would have been if these principles had been carried out in their entirety.

A "free trade" bill has now become the law of the land and will result in the reduction of many tariffs, which is highly desirable. However, the bill has been hobbled with so many provisions to subsidize those presumed to be harmed by the removal of tariffs that in the long run it may do more to harm *true* free trade than to implement it.

In dealing with the land problem, something of the same nature could very easily occur. For the sake of political expediency, land might be bought with bonds. The result would be that the economic rent could wind up in the hands of the bondholders. Zoning and other restrictions designed to protect the rights of land users might be enacted, and these would tend to vitiate the advantages which would come with making access to land easier. In other words, land would not really be free any more than trade is likely to be free under the present "free trade" act.

This is no reason for Georgists to lessen their activities in educating and fighting for a freer world. It merely points up the fact that it is

essential to emphasize that half-way measures will never attain the desired results. Also, it indicates the importance of making crystal clear that the reason we stress a proper system of land tenure is not because of some unreasonable partiality toward one phase of economics. Rather, it is because we recognize that an indispensable prerequisite for freedom is a sound system of land tenure, and only that system which grants the greatest freedom of access to the earth, with equality of opportunity to all, will bring about the results desired.

Until it is definitely proven that access to land is not involved in the perpetual crises we are undergoing, Georgists have a right to insist that the first step to be taken should be to make land freely available. After this is done, if social disturbances still occur, then man will have to look elsewhere to discover why he indulges in such irrational behavior as slaughtering his fellow man. Until that time, Georgists can hardly be criticized if they assume that the land problem is the most important factor in the upheavals of the Crisis Century and that its solution during the latter half of the Twentieth Century is necessary if man dares dream of making the Twenty-first Century one of opportunity and freedom for all.



The loss of Robert C. Bowers of Pittsburgh, as a friend and worker in this movement, is a tragic blow. His death on October 27th ended a life of service that will be commemorated more fully in our next issue.

Mrs. George Olcott, a long time member of the Henry George Woman's Club of Chicago, died on August 16th in California. Her husband published the *Blue Book* on land values, well known to every real estate dealer in Chicago. At his death in 1942 his son Ralph, of Wilmette, took over this important work.