

# Land and Freedom

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## Comment and Reflection

OUR attention is attracted to an article by Newton D. Baker in the magazine section of the *New York Times* of recent date, entitled "Two Wars—Fifteen Years ago and Today." The war of today, as Mr. Baker views it, is a war against depression. There is no analogy unless it be this: that we are fighting depression much as the ancient armies of China are reported to have done by carrying to the field of battle monstrous images of wood and cardboard whose ugly and threatening visage was supposed to strike terror into the hearts of the enemy. There is a likeness here in the methods we are using to overcome depression—blue eagles of frowning countenance, incantations and threats of terrible things.

PERHAPS looking backward to the peak of his career when he was Secretary of War Mr. Baker is betrayed by the war psychology. He complains that the fight against depression is "a glamourless thing having nothing of martial music or the exaltation of mass movements." He speaks of welfare associations, hospitals, the Federal Children's Bureau, as if these really constituted weapons to fight the depression. He urges the maintenance of the morale of the nation as necessary in the fight to overcome depression, when what is really necessary is that men and women should think.

AN appeal to military psychology will not help us here. There is no analogy. We are not meeting a foreign enemy in mortal combat; we are meeting our own mistakes and trying to remedy them—at least some of us are. The conflict, if there is a conflict, is with our own ignorance and injustice and the rules of common honesty—it is intellectual, moral, spiritual. The forces we use are the "imponderables;" we do not and cannot proceed as a nation at prepares for war. The depression is a thing of our own creating; we are not called upon to make physical sacrifices in seeking a solution. But we are asked to put aside political and social preferment. We are asked—and God demands it of us—that we be men and not wooden images.

If this is war it differs from other wars in that there is joy in pursuit of it. It is a wonderful thing to know

a great truth like ours. It is a truth that makes so many things plain; it is the truth that makes us free. We are not perplexed and confused any longer—life has a new meaning. We may for the purpose of rhetoric conceive of this as a Holy War—this struggle against selfishness and greed and injustice.

IF this is a war it is one in which no man is slain and in which only error is destroyed. Yet if Mr. Baker still prefers to think of it in terms of war, if the military phrases spring so easily to the lips of this former pacifist, we venture to ask where he himself stands in the great spiritual conflict of ideas that must be waged. It was Henry IV of France who, returning from the great battle of Arques, sees an officer coming tardily to the field. He shouts to him: "Go hang yourself, Crillar; we have fought at Arques and you were not there!"

IT is interesting to read in the *New York Times* of Oct. 28 an article by A. A. Berle who we are told helped to formulate the Recovery programme. From Washington have come of late statements intended to reassure us that the administration is not making any fundamental changes, but are merely assuming directing functions in industry, and that government is only acting as an agency in this work. And this despite the things that have been done and the more dire things that the administration has threatened.

PROF. Berle is more frank. We quote:

"Those of us who had the privilege of working on the original plan began with the assumption that what we needed most was a machine that worked. Whether it was rugged individualism, Fascism, Communism, Socialism, or what-not, made not the slightest bit of difference."

SO there is nothing fundamental in it—it is all things to all men. No guiding policy is sought or wanted. Not whether it is right or just or equitable, but merely will it work. Doubtless many plans will work in a way. Russian sovietism works—at least nobody starves to death. But if the main purpose and desire of the administration is its workability these architects of the New Folly are ready, on Prof. Berle's own showing, to adopt it!

**N**OR is this all. Suppose it should fail. Prof Berle is ready with his answer. We could then proceed to cancel all debts, all interest payments, all bond obligations, run the railroads, pay nobody anything for work, but issue red cards entitling the holder to apply for what he needs to the nearest government distributing agency. It is true that Prof. Berle cites objections to this programme, but the fact that he offers it is not encouraging, for he says of the N. R. A. that if it cannot be done in one way it will be done in another. In other words what is hinted at is a more that Russian sovietism.

**D**O not be too sure that we are not headed directly for this sort of thing. It is easy to belittle it, to make fun of it. It is indeed calculated to excite the risibilities and guffaws of the angels. But it is a very serious matter. These professors of whom so much fun is being made are in the saddle. They are impetuous young fellows without traditional economic background. Ancient precedents and historical instances of the failure of many of their proposals, such as wage and price-fixing, mean nothing to them. They would cheerfully undertake overnight to renovate heaven and reform the seraphim!

**W**E print in this issue Mr. Chester C. Platt's interesting paper on the essay of Prof. Harry Gunnison Brown read at the Henry George Congress. This must be allowed to stand alone and we assume no responsibility for it. Perhaps we may be permitted here to state a few of the matters on which we disagree with our Single Tax brethren, which may include both Prof. Harry Gunnison Brown and our old friend, Chester Platt. We believe in Henry George's doctrine of interest, that wages and *real* interest rise and fall together, but we hold that he was mistaken in his explanation of its origin and genesis. We differ with Mr. McNair and Mr. Platt in their defence of the N. R. A., much of which is economically unsound and some of it just pure buncombe. Of this our readers need not be informed who have followed the editorial expression in these columns. Our sympathy with Clarence Darrow's condemnation of it is profound, and we echo his astonishment and indignation over the Rooseveltian programme of state socialism.

**A**ND as to the reality of natural law in the economic world we are profoundly convinced. It is a waste of time to argue with men who do not believe in it, as Mr. George himself said. Its denial precedes the acceptance of all the monstrous programme of Prof. Moley, Tugwell, Berle, et al. And we differ with Prof. Harry Gunnison Brown who would belittle the free trade issue. It is bound up with the doctrine of economic freedom. Nor have we ever heard of any reasonable defence of any tax whatsoever—income tax, excise tax, inheritance tax. We condemn in toto the whole evil brood.

**A** WORD about "planning." Man is an organism so is the social state. The "planning" has been long ago done for us. Here is the analogy. All that is needed in the case of the two organisms is to discover the natural law and accord our laws and behavior to it. The law of involuntary cooperation is one of the laws of the social organism. Our chief duty is to see that it is not interfered with. Our work is the removal of every obstacle to the operation of economic laws, which are the natural laws of the organism known as the social state.

**T**HE perception of natural law in the economic world precedes from an understanding of certain concepts of individual rights, the right of man to himself, the right of property in things created by his labor. This same natural law or natural right applies to the community: regards the wealth the community creates, and the concept therefore excludes the right of the community to take any individual property for public use by the income or inheritance tax, or any other device.

**B**UT despite differences which develop in our ranks all those who may properly be regarded as of us, are agreed in taking the value of land for public purposes. So our opponents need not seek for weakness in our ranks by indicating matters on which we disagree. They will have their hands full in defending the citadel of land ownership against the challenge which we issue, growing more and more in volume and determination. On this we are united, and doctrinal differences, though important, are far from being a sign of weakness.

#### THE NEW POLITICAL ECONOMISTS AND THE GODDESS OF PLENTY



—Cartoon in *London Daily Express*.

International Financiers: "Young woman, after much deliberation we have unanimously agreed that YOU are the cause of the world depression. Don't you understand economics?"

Goddess of Plenty: "No, do you?"