

# Land and Freedom

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## Comment and Reflection

THE breaking down of the theory of laissez faire is assumed as a fact in current economic teachings. To establish the "fact" a natural law known as the law of competition must be assumed as having no existence. But if this is so there is no possible form of society save a socialistic one, or a planned society modeled after the Tugwell-Moley-Roosevelt experimentation.

AT a time when science has accomplished so much notable investigation into the working of natural laws, when so many manifestations of physical phenomena are being brought into harmony with causal relations, it is amazing that the science of political economy lags so far behind, floundering desperately in a sea of confusion. Political economists are in agreement on no fundamental principle. If there are natural laws in the association of men, if there is such a thing as a science of society, if production and distribution are governed by natural laws, the economists give no indication of their nature and operation—indeed no intimation that they exist.

IT is a dangerous sea on which the government has embarked through the ignorance of its guiding pilots of fundamental natural laws of production and distribution. Where we should stop there is no certainty, but it is a certainty where we are heading. It is announced that labor unions will form NRA police to boycott offenders who do not live up to the "code." To all those who cherish any traditional American instincts there is no more hateful word than "boycott." There is no more dangerous instrument wielded by organized groups for any purpose. But when the boycott is used as a governmental or pseudo-governmental weapon the distance that separates us from the teachings of the fathers and our own constitution looms wide as the ocean. In this connection we may say that in the closing hours of Congress Hon. James M. Beck delivered a noble address which if this nation sinks to ruin through the abandonment of our liberties will rank as an eloquent requiem for one more hope of mankind gone to destruction.

TO what lengths these men are prepared to go is clear from what Matthew Woll is reported to have said of the "proper penalties" to be visited on those who fail

to cooperate with the provisions of the Recovery Act. He was asked what was meant by "proper penalties." According to the New York *Herald Tribune* of Aug. 12 he replied: "More penalties would be imposed upon the business houses which evaded the spirit of the Recovery Act than were contained in the laws." This is in effect a threat of mob violence. If not contained in the laws these penalties hinted at must be extra-legal. What form they would take is left undisclosed by this spokesman for the union of government and the labor organizations. But to such a danger point have we come in our history that remarks like these go unrebuked. If there is a spark of manhood left in the American people they will visit it with swift condemnation.

GENERAL HUGH S. JOHNSON is part of the administration. What he says has a certain weight, unlike the threats of Matthew Woll. Concerning the penalties for code violation he says: "When somebody takes one of these blue eagles away from some one because of a clear-cut violation the public will be well informed and it will be a sentence of economic death."

HERE is government pronouncement of ruin on a citizen guiltless of any crime. It is so monstrous a suggestion that one wonders if economic recovery brought about by such means would be worth the cost. For even though liberty feed no mouths, yet men have preferred death to its denial in more heroic times. But we are under no such necessity of choosing. Liberty is the way out; the administration has chosen the way of death, and is now under the necessity of proscribing the penalty of economic destruction for some of its more unfortunate citizens who wish to be absolved from this strange religion of insignias, mumbo jumbo, codes and incantations.

THREE practical economists, not members of the "Brain Trust," we are informed by the New York papers, have been arrested for smearing signs in an effort to provide work and help along President Roosevelt's industrial recovery programme. Thousands of sign-painters are out of work and the simplest way to provide work is to destroy existing signs. This was explained by one of the "economists."

WE condemn these arrests as wholly unjustified. We do not see the difference between the sabotage involved in withholding cultivable lands from use as provided in the Farm Act and the procedure of these three sign-painters, save that in one case the farmers are rewarded for the act and the sign-painters punished. We learn that the authors of the Farm Bill are still at large, that neither Wallace nor Tugwell have been arrested but are occupying high official positions. It seems to make a difference who it is that practices sabotage. But nevertheless we continue to protest against the arrest of these sign-painting economists. Has not the government set the example?

IS it possible to write a book on political economy that nobody will understand? That will seem profound? That the critics will praise in a bewildered way? There is a lot of such achievements, books without number. We have just finished reading one of them, "The New Challenge of Distribution," by Harry Tupper, published by Harper and Brothers. Here and there are paragraphs in which the writer seems to be stumbling right against some fundamental problem, only to shift away again with a quality quite opaque.

THE recipe for writing a wholly incomprehensible work on political economy is simple. Assume in the beginning that there is no such thing as natural laws, that competition is always destructive and wholly evil and that something not clearly defined must be done about it. Above all ignore the genesis of production, the natural processes of distribution, that it is from the land men must produce, and that free access to land determines the resultant character of distribution. Do not mention the land at all, "go right on writing" as if all production were some esoteric thing and wealth could be evolved by planning and not by access to the earth, and you have made a book which will seem profound because so difficult to see to the bottom of it. Reviewers will speak of it in accents of awe. We assure our readers that the recipe is quite simple.

THE Albany *Evening Journal* is not afraid to put in a good word for competition. It points out that a dozen years ago the price of a mechanical refrigerator was \$800. Now a better one can be produced for \$200, and it says that it is hard to imagine any controlled or planned economy which could produce such a result. It would not, brother. And it might be well for the madmen at Washington who are driving us to the inevitable smash to consider it. But they will not. With the best of intentions and eyes closed they are heading for the inevitable chaos.

THESE are the sinister aspects of the national recovery act, to which we again return; the partially concealed threat of intimidation, boycott, and business and social ostracism for those who do not or will not travel in harness. Mark Sullivan heads one of his special articles in the New York *Herald Tribune*, "Observers Fear Intimidation Beyond Reason." We suppose a little intimidation within reason would be all right! And a contribution in the same paper from General Johnson seems to hint that the recovery act is a law above the law, for he says: "Moreover we are going to depend for the success of this recovery programme on a force greater than the law and more powerful than anything else—public opinion." And then follows this threat: "With this force behind us it is not hard to imagine that the recalcitrants and the obstructionists are going to be in an uncomfortable if not in an unpleasant position as the programme proceeds."

IT is perhaps useless to appeal to the Constitution as Mr. Beck has done in the great speech previously alluded to. For the authors of this new departure have frankly invoked a law above the law. Professor Tugwell, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, in a speech made before the New York Western Bar Unit at Rochester is refreshingly candid. Though we were promised that the recovery act would be only temporary Prof. Tugwell tells us, "Today and for tomorrow, our problem is that of our national economic maintenance for the public welfare by governmental intervention—any theory of government, law or economics notwithstanding."

HOW ineffably silly in the time to come will seem all these preposterous codifications, blue eagles, rumored licensing of industries, thinly veiled threats of boycotts and intimidation! All this ruthless setting aside of the fundamental guarantees of liberty and the rights of private business to govern in its own household! We say private business so it may not include those public utilities which may because they are natural monopolies, be brought within the field of governmental regulation, or even public ownership and operation.

"PUTTING America to Work," is the title of General Hugh S. Johnson's article previously alluded to. How can Americans be put to work? Here is a continent with immeasurable natural resources, a great workshop. But it is in large part a closed shop. Americans may go to work only by permission of the owners of all the riches in the earth and under the earth, its fertility, its timber, its stored minerals untouched by the hand of man. As long as the "right" to hold these natural riches idle remains all Americans cannot be put to work. And the curious saturnalia of regulations we are now witnessing in the madhouse at Washington is the direct consequence of ignoring this plain and simple truth.