

Land and Freedom

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Current Comment

MR. "ZERO"—otherwise Mr. Urban L. Ledoux—has been in this city for some weeks seeking shelter for the homeless in church edifices. His attempts have not been very successful. Perhaps the novelty of the suggestion has stood in the way. Most people are startled at any proposition to apply the teachings of Jesus. Jesus had very democratic ideas regarding the poor. He felt with instinctive knowledge that poverty was institutional. He even declared that he came to break the bonds of those that were enslaved; he cited the ease with which the fowls of the air made a "living." We know that the Son of Man had not where to lay his head. Ever since his time men able and willing to work have sought vainly for crust and a shelter.

IT is not recorded that Jesus anywhere sought to justify the neglect of the poor by easy reference to the few who do not want to work, with which so many modern wise men brush aside the cry of the needy. We can not gather from His words that he believed the "crime of poverty" due to individual delinquency. Otherwise he would not have shown such a liking for the society of the poor. He would have dealt with them according to their delinquency. It is a matter of record that he did not.

THE churches have improved on the teachings of Jesus by beating them pretty thin. Christianity has erected magnificent cathedrals and massive edifices, and all have iron railings and locks and padlocks. The pews are private for the most part, and sermons evade the practical application of the texts. Religion is too often, not something for daily use, but appeals to a rather remote religious experience and consciousness. The sermons partake of the conventionalities of the time, as, for the most part, they have done in all history. At times the silence is broken by a Savonarola, a Beecher, or a Theodore Parker. But we are asking too much if we demand that ministers of the Gospel speak and act independently of their environment. It is a bread-and-butter question after all.

MR. LEDOUX forgets this. Partly he forgets it because he is not well informed on his economics. He thinks the question is to be solved by getting a few jobs for the unemployed. Matters would not be much improved, might indeed be made worse, if all the churches opened their doors at night to the unsheltered. The pity

is that quests such as Mr. "Zero" has entered upon, with all the devotion of a fine nature and intense sympathy for the distressed, serve to divert attention from the real problem, which is "What is the cause of unemployment?" If it is institutional, inherent in a defective form of society, a product of economic maladjustment, as examination will reveal it to be, then Mr. Ledoux's mission is not only futile, but worse than futile. For it is an expenditure of energy that can accomplish nothing permanent.

THE sympathy to which he appeals, however, is not to be despised. For it is not enough to *know*; it is necessary also to *feel*. Luke North put it aptly when he said that the only difference was between those who *cared* and those who did not. There are many who know but do not care; "Mr. Zero" cares and does not know. It is first necessary to know and then to care; knowledge must direct the sympathy that is expended; otherwise the sympathy is wasted. If one has the knowledge yet does not care he is as useless in the present crisis as those whom Luke North sought to stigmatize. If the Single Tax movement could borrow even a modicum of Mr. Ledoux's fine crusading spirit it would cause something of a stir in the world.

GEORGE W. HINMAN is a writer on the *New York American*. In the issue of that paper for Jan. 9 he discusses the question of unemployment. As this writer's view-point is that of many modern teachers of economics we quote:

"A man and a woman cannot occupy the same job. If the women can do the work and will do it, the men must go elsewhere for work. If there is nowhere else to go, he joins the rank of the unemployed. In England, apparently, he often has to do this. In the United States, where employment is more plentiful, where in good times there is work enough for all, he often has only to change his job or his occupation."

And again:

"Only one thing is sure. It is, that when the times are poor more men are unemployed if many women work; that only in this country is there at any time work enough for all workers of both sexes, and that in an old and settled country like England women's employment means a certain amount of men's unemployment year in and year out."

And finally:

"In general, there would not be so many men sitting on park benches if there were not so many women employed in what were once men's places."

WHAT is involved in this economic concept? That just so many jobs exist, less in an old and settled country and more in countries not so old and settled—for reasons not clearly indicated. Just what is the proportion of jobs to population in either case, we are not told. The theory seems to be that jobs decline as population increases, not because access to land becomes more difficult as it rises in price and more and more of it is withdrawn from use, but because the number of jobs is arbitrarily fixed in the nature of things, though varying in good and bad times. As two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time, and there are just so many spaces, so to speak, in this employment question, it must follow that if a woman steps into the place occupied by a man, the man must step out. Mr. Hinman has said it: "A man and a woman cannot occupy the same job." Accepting the premise, the conclusion follows, of course.

IT will probably surprise Mr. Hinman to be told that jobs are infinite. There is no limit to them save only as they are limited by the fencing in of natural opportunities, and that is an artificial limitation. Land furnishes the only opportunity for employment. Mr. Hinman sees that in new and unsettled countries jobs are plentiful and he is strangely misled as to the cause. Adam Smith, writing over a hundred years ago, noted the phenomenon of high wages and workers fully employed in the colonies of the New World. He attributed it, with his usual keenness of judgement, to the cheapness of land and easy access to it—the primary determining cause of high wages and constancy of employment.

OBSERVING the phenomenon of falling wages and unemployment that often accompany population, economists like Mr. Hinman accept what appears to be the obvious solution of unemployment. Surely if there are only so many jobs—so many unfilled spaces to be occupied, so to speak, in a given population,—a doubling of the population ought to cut employment opportunities to one half. Yet who is not aware that no such thing happens. And why? Because every man that is employed in producing anything is making a demand on the labor of some one else—and thus creating jobs for others. This is what economists call "effective demand." It follows, therefore, that the more population the more jobs. It is only when rent begins to press upon wages and land speculation sets in that the "effective demand" is reduced. Industry halts and wages decline. Women and children are crowded into the labor market at lower wages than men with families can afford to work for, and the condition is presented, for an explanation of which Mr. Hinman, instead of seeking the deeper solution, seizes upon the fanciful interpretation of a certain fixity in the number of jobs in a given population, determined, it would seem, by divine predestination!

THE death of Samuel Gompers removes from the labor movement one whose talent for generalship is not likely soon to be equalled. But this is the most that can be said of him. As much as the great "captains of industry" he was a monopoly builder. He sought to perfect an organization strong enough to extort from capital more than the return determined by the natural flux of labor and capital. At best, or worst if you please, such organization could include but a very small percentage of those remuneratively employed. And the advantage wrested from capital by the organized group must be at the expense of the unorganized in higher prices for commodities and higher cost of living. To this extent the influence of Samuel Gompers was an evil one. In so far as he led workingmen to think in terms of labor monopoly, he was a greater enemy of labor than any of the capitalists anathematized by the American Federation.

SAMUEL GOMPERS used to point with pride to the fact that he had prevented many strikes. No doubt this was so. But the temporary absence of strikes marks merely a truce between two hostile forces. The ultimate resort is a strike, as every one understands, just as the ultimate aim of great armaments between nations interested in the same stake, is *war*. To maintain that industrial peace can be brought about by an armed truce between capital entrenched and labor militant, is an idle dream. What Mr. Gompers and those who think with him are preparing for is war, not peace. Peace is not possible where the producing forces of the world stand divided and where Labor striking blindly at the capitalist man of straw sees not the figure of Monopoly with hands abstracting the joint earnings both of Labor and Capital. Mr. Gompers and those who think with him lend to Socialism nearly all its strength, and because Mr. Gompers hated the Socialism which he was helping unconsciously to strengthen, Socialists were right in despising him.

IT was believed that the leader of the American Federation of Labor saw what was involved in the conflict between Labor and Capital. It will be recalled by readers of LAND AND FREEDOM that he was stirred to something like anger into replying to our criticism of his position. It had been rumored that he was a Single Taxer. He was very proud of his friendship with Henry George and referred to it on several occasions. It did not seem to us that his pronouncements gave any hint of his having acquired anything of value from that acquaintance. We challenged the fiction that had been industriously built up around him and that credited him with a belief in the economic philosophy of the Great Emancipator.

IF Mr. Gompers were a believer in this philosophy, he was a sinner against the light. But now that he is gone and rests secure from praise or blame, it may be well to