

Land and Freedom

FORMERLY THE SINGLE TAX REVIEW

VOL. XXXIV

MARCH—APRIL, 1934

No. 2

Comment and Reflection

DEMOCRACY, the assertion of the sovereignty and inviolability of the individual, begins with the French Revolution and the American war for independence. Its spokesmen were a few gifted Frenchmen, followed by Jefferson, Franklin and Paine. It did not begin under very promising auspices. The United States began by adopting most of the legendary superstitions of the old world, like slavery and the protective tariff, as corner stones of the new edifice. It was quite as tenacious of privilege as the old Europe from which it had broken away, despite Paine, whom we have not yet begun to understand.

NEVERTHELESS, democracy lumbered along in an ineffectual way for nearly three quarters of a century from the Confederation to the Civil War. This despite the extraordinary powers lodged in the Chief Executive, and the archaic mode of his selection. Following the Civil War democracy was powerless to effect an interruption of the insidious processes in which gigantic monopolies grew through the influence of a fostering tariff and railroad grants of land, great in area as empires. The concentration of wealth helped to create industrial dictators who dominated legislatures and in many cases controlled the judiciary. Democracy and all it connotes were chiefly useful in furnishing material for Fourth of July orations.

DEVICES of democracy which, it was hoped, would advance the cause of popular government, the direct primary, commission government, popular election of senators, et al., came and went and left not a wrack behind; democracy seemed powerless to make its instruments effective.

IF democracy is merely a toy with which the people amuse themselves while privilege rules triumphant, then is some stronger form of government needed to replace a system in which universal suffrage is demonstrably fifty per cent ineffectual, since only a small proportion exercise the privilege at all, and the fifty per cent that concern themselves with government seem to lack the necessary vigilance to prevent nation-wide abuses, then it is time to revise our notions of democracy and our entire political philosophy.

THE chief requirements of any well ordered society is that the people should *care*. Look around and ask yourself how much do they care. Their attitude toward political corruption is one of cynical indifference and toward economic and governmental problems an uninquiring ignorance. Men who will grow eloquent over automobiles and radios, when the tariff is mentioned mumble a few commonplaces or stupid shibboleths, or pure absurdities borrowed from the platforms of one or other of the old political parties, and then hastily drop the discussion.

NOR is the case greatly different with your college and university graduate. Government, and the problems with which it must deal is the least of his concern as it has been the least of his studies. If he remembers anything he has learned of political economy it is rarely or never the principles of the science, since he has probably been taught that there are no principles of universal application, but only rules of expediency. What he has learned may fit him for a professional or business career, but in most cases he graduates as little fitted for citizenship as a Fiji islander. What wonder that he has no intellectual curiosity about government and soon lapses into indifference? Presidential elections are only sporting events in which he takes the same interest that he does in horse racing or football. But that these should turn upon matters of real concern to the nation, that there are grave problems that need to be solved at such times, and that government is the agency which should act in solving them—these considerations rarely occur to him. His "politics," in which he exhibits a quite childish pride, is delightfully free from any attempt to get down to hard thinking about it.

NOR is the philosophy of present day writers likely to aid him. Of a piece with university thinking, most of them have little concern with moral principles. There are no moral principles that are unvarying; they are national, climatic or expedient, as fits the case; the Decalogue is an elastic yard measure, variously applied. He hears of pragmatism, behaviourism, and other isms, but that there are any ethical laws to which human conduct in society must conform or suffer the consequences, he is in utter ignorance. Nobody teaches it, so his democracy drifts a derelict on the political sea.

HOW account for what seems to the eyes of many the obvious failure of democracy? It is curious that the political philosophers who with unseemly haste assume that democracy is now ready for burial, never consider what would give Demos a new lease of life. They stop with the shallow sophistry of George Bernard Shaw that it is idle to expect the audience to run the show, as if this were a perfect analogy.

POPULAR sovereignty has broken down because democracy has been called upon to bear more than it can sustain. It has broken down because its organizers have assumed that it could safely concern itself with all departments of human activity. They did not see that it was functionally limited to a few matters of social concern. This can easily be seen in the case of Italy where fascism is the direct result of socialistic inefficiency which broke down under the load it was forced to carry. It behooves us to see if our own government does not present a similar analogy, though the consequences will not be the same everywhere. A high mettled thoroughbred has been asked to do the work of a dray horse.

THERE are certain things that political society or government must *not* do; there are certain things it *cannot* do. Its activities of late under the Roosevelt administration have been concerned mostly with the latter. We have therefore had little time to consider the things we ought to do. The faith in government held by the average individual is at the bottom of our troubles. "Pass a law"—that is the remedy for every difficulty that suggests itself to the average citizen. It is not realized that government is functionally limited to the things it may do.

IS not the individual something? Has he no rights that may be left to him, no matters that are his own concern, no temptations by which he may grow strong and develop his character in resisting? Has not the individual stripped himself of every democratic initiative? How then expect the political democracy he has erected to be truly democratic?

THERE are other and more important impediments to democracy. Our whole economic system is one of privilege. Government is bound up with it. Every senator is not merely a representative of the people of his state; he is the representative of some special interest, some monopoly, some big business seeking government favors. Senators are Railroad, Wheat, or Iron, or Cotton, or Silver Senators. And this not deliberately nor venally always, but actually because of the close partnership of government with privilege. The corrupting influence of the tariff, for one thing, is over all, a slimy trail.

DEMOCRACY is possible only where men are free; a political democracy is feasible only where it limits its activities to matters that are within its province and where the individual is left free to work out his own salvation. "That government is best which governs least" is not all of it; in those things which are governmental it must govern absolutely. The whole fabric of society needs to be placed under a rigid analysis to discover why the hope of democracy has in so large a measure eluded us.

THE answer will be discovered in the two reasons which we have indicated, that democracy has been overweighted, that institutions are unjust, and that government has been corrupted by privilege. In this country we have proceeded on the assumption that government is unlimited in scope, whereas it is strictly conditioned. Democracy cannot be yoked with privilege and still be free to function. The expectation is falacious.

THOUGH forms of government do not greatly matter, it is still true that political institutions borrow their status from the kind of economic freedom that prevails, their character as well as their duration and stability. That is what Henry George meant when he said that the condition of progress is "association in equality." Political equality is not possible without the economic background of association in equality.

DEMOCRACY therefore has a much wider application than is given to it in current discussion about forms of government. Until one man can look another in the face, until it is no longer necessary to beg the boon of work, to sue his fellow man for a job, will political democracy, or democracy of any kind, be possible. For this reason Single Taxers beat the air when they concern themselves with forms of government, city management, direct primaries, and sundry devices to the neglect of the only change that makes democracy attainable.

THE growth of fascism and communism alike is attributable to economic conditions. Fascism is the half-unconscious resistance of the House of Have to the claim of the disinherited. Communism is a different sort of resistance to the same condition of landless men. Fascism is instinctive. It could never find lodgment even in society of half free men. It is lower than monarchy because it springs from a deeper degree of slavery; it lacks the popular appeal of a monarchial form of government; it is far less responsive to real public wrongs. It tolerates nothing that is not to its own glory and substitutes for the possible kindly sovereign a figure that grows more and more of a soulless abstraction representing the state. This statement may be enforced by an understanding of

the different way in which several European leaders are regarded. For example, King George is loved, Hitler and Mussolini are feared.

BUT to talk democracy to men who are economic slaves, who must beg the boon of work, or who must subsist upon charity, is a ghastly mockery. To ask of men deprived of power to control their own affairs that they participate in the business of government, is a joke, but a sardonic joke. From the substratum of social misery, which is the lot of the majority of men, we may with absolute certainty trace the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy, the decay of liberalism in Great Britain and the decline of democracy in America.

Two Presidents to Another

SAID Woodrow Wilson: "I do not want to live under a philanthropy. I do not want to be taken care of by the government, either directly or by any instruments through which the government is acting."

President Roosevelt will please note and remember the N.R.A. codes.

Again said President Wilson: "If any part of our people want to be wards, if they want to have guardians put over them, if they want to be taken care of, if they want to be children patronized by government, why I am sorry, because it will sap the manhood of America."

Professor Tugwell and the socialistically inclined Roosevelt are invited to reflect upon this.

And again we quote the last Democratic President, Woodrow Wilson: "I do not want a smug lot of experts to sit down behind closed doors in Washington and play Providence to me. There is a Providence to which I am perfectly willing to submit. But as for other men setting up as Providence over myself I seriously object. I have never met a political savior in the flesh and I never expect to meet one."

Respectfully submitted for the consideration of the President and his experts!

From a President who also lies in his grave and has been longer time dead, come these momentous words, which President Roosevelt is also asked to note and perhaps take to heart: It is Abraham Lincoln who speaks:

"The land, the earth God gave to man for his home, sustenance and support, should never be the possession of any man, corporation, or unfriendly government, any more than air or water, if as much."

Lincoln saw the land question. He would have dealt with it in the big way. To him there was no such thing as property in land any more than in air or water.

He had no doubt of the principle he laid down. Of the method to be pursued he was not so certain. He said: A reform like this will be worked out some time in the future." He knew the movement would meet with opposi-

tion and he knew the kind of opposition it would meet. Very forcibly he says:

"The idle talk of idle men that is so common now, will find its way against it, with whatever force it may possess, and strongly promoted and carried on as it can be by land monopolists, grasping landlords, and the titled and untitled senseless enemies of mankind everywhere."

Thus spoke the Prophet-President. Is Franklin Roosevelt capable of understanding?

Save the School

WHEN two years ago Oscar H. Geiger started the Henry George School of Social Science it was with deep-seated faith that the support necessary for its maintenance would be forthcoming. This faith has been justified only in part. Such contributions as have been received have been only sufficient to carry on in a small way, and the work is seriously handicapped for funds.

We are not asking now for contributions from those able to give but five dollars or so, though these are welcome, and such responses have been generous indeed. We are appealing now to those wealthy Henry George men who are able to contribute substantial sums. Of these there must be quite a number. One or two in this fortunate class have responded. But not enough. Five thousand dollars a year are needed to do the things that ought to be done. This is the amount imperatively needed for the work.

We sometimes wonder if our friends to whom a large contribution would mean little have the vision to see the possibilities of this great experiment. Mr. Geiger has made a beginning, a small beginning, it is true, but large enough to furnish a demonstration. The enrolment of eighty students, a great number of them public and high school teachers, members of seven or eight classes, should thrill the imagination. Let us figure a Joseph Fels on the scene, and the School in receipt of \$50,000 a year! The Henry George University would be in sight and further liberal endowments would follow. What a future would be made possible—the great gospel of industrial emancipation inculcated in a great educational institution to which the youth of the country would flock!

This appeal to wealthy Single Taxers of vision—and we think there must be such—would not be complete without a word as to the Director. Of all those who have gone before, the great apostles of the movement whom we love to recall, Mr. Geiger does not rank as an orator like John S. Crosby, a crusader like Father McGlynn, a fiery enthusiast like Hugh O. Pentecost, but as a teacher he surpasses them all. Not at any time in the history of the movement has there appeared so richly qualified an instructor. With a tactfulness and art of appeal he draws these young people to him. Socialists and communists, so often impervious, answer to this appeal. Not only does he know from the fund of a deep-stored mind the things he wishes