

Land and Freedom

FORMERLY THE SINGLE TAX REVIEW

VOL. XXXIII

MARCH—APRIL, 1933

No. 2

Comment and Reflection

THERE is no limit to the number and kinds of suggested cures for the depression. The latest is that of Glen H. Spence, who hails from Brooklyn, N. Y. He actually argued it before the Senate Judiciary Committee at Washington. He would shift the burden of taxation from land to the machine. The *Brooklyn Eagle*, which is an amateur newspaper run as a daily in that locality, says "the plan sounds like the soul of simplicity."

MR. SPENCE, or the *Eagle*, says: "Every explanation that is now offered for the depression includes the overproduction due to the over-efficiency of machinery in the list of major causes. "We suppose that if machines were not over-efficient, but just reasonably efficient, the whole matter might be righted. Just how to make them behave is Mr. Spence's job. We would remind him, however, that many of the authorities who are competent to speak do not believe that overproduction has anything to do with it, but rather the defects in the methods of distribution.

ACCORDING to the rather original plan of Mr. Spence a machine is to be taxed on the basis of the manpower it "displaces." He does not see that the progress of machinery opens up other avenues of employment and makes for the increase of demand for man power "A per hour tax figure would be set for every type of machine. In this way production would be kept down and prices would rise, thus bringing about the much desired inflation without dangerous tinkering with the currency, which recent suggestions of inflation schemes include. Manufacturers could thus expand their business," continues the *Eagle*, in describing the plan, taking it for granted that increased prices would *not* reduce consumption.

WE do not know Mr. Spence, but we would say that if he is serious, and of course he must be, his plan is no more ridiculous than many that are suggested. Perhaps the *Eagle* in giving the plan a kind of sanction is laughing in its sleeve. We do not know. But we do know this. We know that the workers in the Lancashire mills rioted when the Arkwright spinning jenny was introduced and the arguments used were those of our Brooklyn friend. They had rather more excuse than the strange Mr. Spence,

for the opportunities for elementary education are greater today. His suggestion appears to be sort a of Single Tax on machines to relieve altogether what he calls "real estate." So perhaps there is method in his madness. But think of a Senate Judiciary Committee listening to it!

THE dislocation of our banking system is not of course something in itself. It is directly consequent on the breaking down of our economic system. And at such times there always follows a flood of theories dealing with the money question. It was so following the depression of 1893, with the appearance of "Coin's Financial School," marked by its extraordinary circulation and the curious political phenomenon of Bryanism, when the Nebraskan swept a national convention off its feet with the cry echoed from coast to coast, "You shall not crucify mankind on a cross of gold," when he should have known, if he knew anything, that it was not the gold standard on which mankind was being crucified, but something quite different. Poor Bryan, who ended his career by attacks on a curious theory of the descent of man from the monkey, which he thought was Darwinism!

IT is strange how the money question, so-called, tempts so many really good minds into lunacy. Herbert Spencer thought that the government should have nothing to do with the issuance of money, beyond stamping the coinage and guaranteeing its weight and fineness. Henry George, on the other hand, considered the issuance of money as purely a government function. Both of these theories may be logically defended; either, under proper economic conditions, we have no doubt, may be made to work. But between them lies the twilight zone of a hundred theories of money that are nothing less than fantastic, Prof. Irving Fisher's india rubber dollar, the energy unit of the Technocrats, a periodic change in the gold content of the dollar, together with schemes of inflation, wide, varied and numberless as the sands of the shore.

AND no apprehension in the minds of these people, apparently, of the purely subsidiary nature of the money question. We had an earthquake recently in California, due, as the seismologists tell us, to what they call a "fault" in the earth's strata. Suppose it were possible to get down below earth's surface, remedy the "fault" and make the foundations secure. We need then no longer

regulate the height and structure of buildings. While we can do nothing like this in the geologic field, happily in the economic field we may. All we have to do is to dig down, repair the "fault," and make the foundations secure. Is not the analogy a perfect one? Then all economic and financial earthquakes, whatever our system of money, or banking, will not occur, or if they should may be easily met and overcome.

THERE is no better guide to the character and intelligence of a people than its newspapers. What do they read, what is their daily intellectual pabulum and what do the newspapers consider it mostly to their profit to feature in their columns? For newspapers are commercial enterprises, more so indeed than they were in the days when great figures like Greeley, Dana, Raymond, Watterson, were able to attract by sheer force of genius, a great share of popular attention. They were able to command for what they had to say an influential, almost idolatrous audience. In this there were certain disadvantages, it is true, but it made the great editors in the days of personal journalism independent of the counting room. They were free to express themselves.

ALL that we have left of these better days of journalism are a score or more columnists of reputation. Of these only about half a dozen may be said to be independent of the business policy of their papers. Like the editorial writers the great majority of them are obedient servants of the counting room. They dare not express unpopular opinions; they dare not be more fundamental than their readers. But superficial as they are they are the hope of a re-born journalism. There is a saving remnant of the American people to whom the independent personal element appeals; they will not always be satisfied with the colorless journalism that looks only to circulation and fears to offend. Apathetic and uninspired as are the people generally there are enough of them to welcome a journal that shall be as good a newspaper as the *New York Times* and which unlike the *Times* in its subservient attitude to privilege, shall blaze the pathway to a better society. With a Greeley or Watterson it will not lack for readers.

A FEW papers in the more immediate past have approached the great ideal, but have not quite achieved it. The *New York World* and the *New York Globe* are instances in point. They disappeared, and their places were taken by tabloids with their almost fabulous circulation. The decline in the character of our newspapers was coincident with the decline of popular intelligence. For we think there can be no question that the average mentality of today is below that of thirty years ago. And the reading matter of the public, especially its newspapers, is an accurate index of this decline. And all this is inevitable with the concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer hands. With the struggle growing more and more intense, what the people

read must continue to deteriorate and the intellectual and moral quality of our journals, despite the superficial cleverness of editorial writers and columnists, be accurately representative of this decline.

AND here we want to bring a more direct accusation against the newspapers, an accusation which will not be denied by those who know the sources from which they draw their sustenance. If the truth should be told it would be startling. A list of the real owners of the more influential newspapers would read like the "Who's Who" of a Wall Street roster. They are not merely influenced by the privileged and predatory interests—they are owned by them. And right here may be told a story, well authenticated. At a meeting held some years ago by a group of eminent financiers who own pretty nearly all the natural resources and railroads of the country, one of them expressed a fear of socialism. Another, by all odds the leader among them, said there was nothing to fear from that source, for the American people would not countenance socialism. "What about the Single Tax?" queried another. "Ah," said the gentleman who had first spoken, "that is different, that has teeth." Is it any wonder that these men who own and control the newspapers will not be likely to favor its discussion, and will not this explain the silence of our great metropolitan organs and others on the only remedy that will solve the situation?

YES, "that has teeth." It will clip the wings of monopoly. It is insidious, because easy of adoption. It can be accomplished without revolution. When really started it will move fast. Do our readers suppose that these gentlemen, many of them at least, do not know this? They do. And the newspapers they own outright will not give undue publicity to it. They will not even mention it save only by reason of its value as news, for they are still newspapers. And up to a certain point, or as long as they dare, the newspapers that are owned by privilege will maintain a discreet silence.

IT was a good suggestion offered by a subscriber, H. Arnold Jacobson, that we publish for the benefit of some of those who seem to be confused as to terms, a few definitions for the enlightenment of socialists, communists and not a few political economists. These gentlemen will be challenged to accept or reject them and furnish definitions of their own. "I will talk with you, my friend, but you must first define your terms," said Voltaire. Happily we have been supplied by a series of definitions of economic terms by M. L. Kathan, of Coquille, Ore. Mr. Kathan is a new convert, about twenty-five years of age, and a teacher in the local schools.

Here these definitions follow:

Land: All natural opportunity. That which is included between the center of the Earth and the extremities of the atmosphere. NOT produced by Labor.