

Land and Freedom

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Comment and Reflection

A GAIN we protest against the misuse of the word "radical." Every half-baked thinker on economics with some crazy scheme for social amelioration is dubbed a "radical." Now radical means going to the root. In this sense the 25th chapter of Leviticus is radical, as are Isaiah, Moses and Henry George. Socialists and communists may be superficial, even dangerous, but they are never radical. A radical is one who "thinks through."

THE touchstone of economic wisdom, the foundation that must be laid before we speculate as to the superstructure, is freedom. This is the negation of all planning, of all restriction and regulation. A true society is not built in this way. We must begin with assuming the voluntary cooperation of individuals, to the essential success of which all existing restrictions must be removed. The field then is left free for the normal development of society out of healthy natural impulses.

THE thought carries us far and wider. Tennyson wrote: "The individual withers and the world is more and more." The exact reverse is true, for despite the complications of government and the encroachments of the state there is at bottom an increasing impatience with the meddling of parliamentarianism, which in some degree accounts for the phenomenon of dictatorships which seeks to throw all this aside. It matters not for the moment if the individual is sunk in the prevailing ascendancy of dictators springing from the very impatience of nations with the futile pottering of legislation. Dictators are a natural reaction to the failure of society to get itself straightened out on the bread and butter question which we call economics.

SO, contrary to Tennyson, the struggle is still with the individual. He does not wither while the world grows more and more, but with increasing intelligence, as well as with increasing impatience, he beats the sides of his cage while he struggles to escape. He is striving to free himself from the same restrictions which short-sighted reformers like the socialists seek to impose. It is not to exaggerate when we say that the constant if

not always conscious struggle of mankind has been to escape government.

THE prevalence of dictatorships is not due to the failure of democracy since democracy has not been tried. Nor is it wholly due to the slave-mindedness developed in vast masses of the people by poverty and misery. The latter explains in part the ease with which dictators have slipped into power. But it has other reasons which we have indicated. Not that democracy has failed, but that those, in whose control it was, have failed to make it work.

DEMOCRACY has seemingly failed in its artificial devices. These devices are now revealed in their naked impotency. Hailed with unbounded enthusiasm by the reformers they have amounted to but little. Among these are the secret ballot, the Initiative and Referendum, the Recall, Commission Government for cities, etc., etc. These devices were intended to realize the efficiency of an improved democracy. On the whole they have turned out to be bitter disappointments.

IN a larger field the League of Nations, Woman Suffrage, Disarmament, Prohibition and the Repeal of Prohibition, have all failed to redeem the glory of their promise. And the corruption of cities is probably as deep and wide-spread as it ever was. We turn out Tammany Hall once or twice in every decade because the Hall seems to represent, whether justly or not, the forces most abhorrent to the friends of good government. But there must be something not entirely without merit in the organization which returns so repeatedly to power. Either that, or the human side of the organization finds its appeal among the poor and lowly.

CERTAINLY the revelations of committees appointed to disclose corruption in the high places of our city governments, as notably the Seabury investigation, and the many similar committees of inquiry that have preceded it, show nothing but the futility of such investigations. They help to focus attention on some aspiring politician, who momentarily flickers, moth-fashion, in the political limelight. And that is all. It seems not to have occurred to these gentlemen that the little im-

provement they strive for, the small corruptions they would abolish, are as nothing compared to the basic wrongs from which after all most of these lesser wrongs spring. The hope to rid ourselves by jailing offenders is a childish delusion. But, as we say, it is of momentary advantage to some Lexow, Raines or Jerome. Maybe these investigations have their uses as civic spasms. But history tells how little lasting are their effects.

THE shallowness and superficiality that characterize these futile investigations into various systems of municipal corruption, the regularly recurring fanfare which makes front-page news, serve no useful purpose, and the suspicion grows that they are not meant to serve any. No hint is forthcoming from any one starting or controlling these investigations as to what should be done about it. With more than half of the population in want or in fear of want the division in part of this population into a dependent class on one side and a predatory class on the other is inevitable with all that flows from it. Hereafter it will be well for those appointed to take part in such investigation to consider not whom it is intended to discredit, but for whose particular glorification it was designed. In short, cui bono?

AS there is a superficiality wide-spread in current reasoning so in phraseology. We have been wondering who are the "economic royalists" referred to by Mr. Roosevelt to describe a group not clearly identified. We concede that they may be undesirable but who are they? What do they represent? We were a little puzzled by the term Tories whom we linked up with the little pants presser in Jersey City and those who would make him a member—a rather insignificant one, it seemed to us—of what Professor Tugwell calls "a disciplined industry," all industrialists, great and small, being so many bad little boys to be whipped and sent to bed.

ONE of the ablest democratic leaders who has "walked out" is Joseph B. Ely, former governor of Massachusetts. In an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* of July 4 he gives his reasons for refusing to support President Roosevelt for reelection. He does not realize the significance of much that he says—that we fear is obvious. It is even a little exasperating to find him stumbling over the truth and then shying away from it—quite unintentionally, we believe.

HE quotes Jefferson as follows:

"A wise and frugal government which shall restrain men from injuring one another, which shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvements, and shall not take from the mouths of labor the bread it has earned."

Mr. Ely comments as follows:

"That was the ideal—the American ideal of political and economic freedom. That was our heritage—the greatest heritage ever received by any people in the world's history. And during the years we have neglected our heritage. We have allowed it to be violated. In the rush to conquer a new continent, in the concentration necessary to build up the greatest industrial nation the world has ever seen, we have failed to guard against encroachments on our freedom."

DOES he really sense the significance of the following:

"No, there will be little said about the real underlying issue. That will have to wait for another four years—perhaps longer. But sooner or later, it must be faced and the answer must be given."

YES, indeed the answer must be given. In another part of his article he says:

"We were not visited by these destructive forces because we believed in political and economic freedom. Ample proof can be found in the fact that the depression is world-wide, whereas political and economic freedom, unfortunately, is not."

GOVERNOR ELY has placed his foot on the first step of the threshold. He has knocked at the door. No one with voice comparable to his in weight and influence has come so near to indicating the real problem. We thank him. Will he now go on from where he has stopped? It is but a little way; his words unlike the ballyhoo to which we have been accustomed to listen mean something. He may not know all it means—we suspect he does not. But he hears the ringing of the bells in the steeple; he knows the direction and will find the church.

IT may be well to elaborate somewhat on the message of Governor Ely to the American people, so that our readers may sense its importance. He says: "We cannot have a planned economy under the American system." Governor Ely is one of the few men whose opposition to the Roosevelt programme is really important. He sees that something more is required than the defeat of the administration and the New Deal. He sees that to guard against a recurrence of another four years of un-American experimentation it is necessary also to defeat the insidious forces which working from without have determined the character of much of our legislation. He seeks to restore what he calls "a free economy," but he has his own idea about that and he is very positive that there is a real underlying issue, a problem to which sooner or later "an answer must be given." He therefore goes beyond the merely negative criticism of Roosevelt which is common enough, but advances to occupy what is the real battleground of the future.