

(1942)

[Handwritten signature]

HGSSS - SPEAKERS BUREAU

"ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND HENRY GEORGE"

by M. B. Thomson

Nearly four score years ago, the great emancipator met his death at the hands of an assassin. A nation mourned and the ship of state limped into port after the severest storm it had ever encountered while on the deck its captain lay fallen. A perplexed people prayed for guidance and the world waited in wonder as to what would happen to freedom in the land of the free.

A year before the tragedy Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg uttered words the simplicity of which indicated their grandeur; words which gave to the world and to history a priceless pattern of English literature and a shining example of humane kindness and sympathetic understanding.

Since that night at the theatre when the tragedy in the audience eclipsed the tragedy on the stage, the halo smashers have gotten to work on Lincoln even as they did on every other great man since the beginning of time. These halo smashers love to tell of George Washington's ill-fitting false teeth and of scandals linked with his name. They love to point out how Napoleon had the itch and how he was afflicted with the greatest inferiority

complex in all history; that Jesus mingled with prostitutes and Abe Lincoln was a shyster lawyer and a petty politician.

Now all of this makes excellent copy and interesting reading yet none of it has in anyway diminished the achievements of these great leaders of men and I, for one, do not condemn the halo smashers for the side-lights or shadows that they cast upon the illustrious. Rather, and this is a purely personal opinion, I feel that these reflections do a service. I think that deification can do more harm to a great personality than humanization and I find a source of solace in the fact that great men were subject to the same frailties and weaknesses that beset you and me.

But let us stick to Lincoln. What difference does it make that Abe Lincoln might have been a shyster lawyer or a petty politician. What if he was an opportunist . . . What if he was a dark horse that got the nomination by a lucky political break. What difference does it make that some of the later views held by Lincoln contradict the

earlier convictions that he held. The important thing is that Lincoln rose to the occasion when the occasion came about, and he rose in majestic dignity. And there he shall remain in the hearts of men and annals of history.

The Gettysburg speech is of course the outstanding and most familiar of all his utterances, And while there are other magnificent examples of Lincoln's ability in this field I will deal very briefly with the Gettysburg address because of its familiarity.

The opening paragraph is all that I need repeat to you in connection with the things that I will bring for your consideration this evening.

"Four score and seven years ago our forefathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

Here Lincoln brought forth the idea that as long as there was slavery there was certainly no possibility of equality

among men in the nation. As long as men were able to own other men such a thing as equality was not only impossible but unthinkable. At the time of his assassination Lincoln and the nation (the North at least) were convinced that at last ~~American~~ could face this wondering world on the subject of freedom in ~~American~~ and say "Here men are created equal. Here the lowliest has the same opportunity as the man in the exalted position. The farm boy that drives his cows to pasture this morning may in a few years be a leader of commerce or government. The poor mountaineer may some day sit in the seat of the president, and the lowly school master of the plains can and may someday obtain a place on the high judicial bench. Opportunity is here for one and all, and each has as much right and chance as the other of rising to the top of the heap. We have proven that this is a government of the people, for the people and by the people. Injustices are cleared up by the will of the populace and we are governed by ourselves, not by ^{some} ~~weakling~~ whose only right

to rule rests in the fact that he was lucky enough to have a father born a king.

While a nation bowed its head in sorrow still it could not lift that same head in defiance to all who even dared to intimate that this was not the land of the freed, and Abraham Lincoln had guided the nation through the cruel chaos that finally enabled us to cleanse the one dark blot on our national soul. Led by Lincoln, America had freed the slaves, saved the union and guaranteed to every American his right to equality of birth and the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Well, my friends, nearly four score years after this period of mingled joy and sadness, I am not a halo smasher when I tell you that Lincoln did not free the slaves.

That here in these United States of America, today there is a slavery just as vicious, just as degrading and just as remorselessly exacting of an unparadonably disproportionate part of the fruits of the workers' toil as could be found in the most inhuman chattel slavery. Did Lincoln free the

slaves when the emancipation proclamation was but an instrument that changed the name but not the essence of slavery.

Of course chattel slavery is obliterated from the face of the earth but I tell you that its abolition worked far greater benefits to the oppressor than the oppressed.

As far as the negro slaves were concerned the emancipation merely put them in the class of the poor white trash that formed a festering scab on the complexion of Southern aristocracy and on whom even the slaves in many instances looked down.

When a swamp was to be drained the slave-owner did not send a \$1500 slave into the teeming wilderness, because if a snake bit the laborer or yellow fever struck him down the plantation would suffer the loss of a \$1500 investment.

Instead, to one of these poor white trash, an Italian, French or Spanish "free man" was assigned the dangerous task at a dollar or so a day. And with the payment of this pittance all responsibility ended. Let him sicken, let him

die, it was of no concern to the slave-owner.

Chattel slaves were kept that the slave-holder might appropriate all of the fruits of the slaves' labor save that small fraction required for the maintenance of the slave. In other words, all except enough to keep the slave alive.

Today, my friends, the so-called free man receives less than that.

The only advantage the present slave has over the chattel slave is the scant satisfaction he receives in the knowledge that he is nominally free.

I believe there are thousands of men in the U. S. today who would gladly pledge themselves to work for the rest of their lives for anyone who would guarantee them food enough to keep them fit and healthy, clothing to keep them warm, a roof over their heads, and in the event of sickness provide medical care.

In any city there are certainly thousands of men that would gladly work for enough money to provide them with food and clothing and the most meager shelter. That, my

friends, was all that the slaves received.

In our American ~~there~~ there are men today reduced to virtual peonage. Living in company houses, trading at company stores, and continually so submerged in debt to the company that they never expect to be free of financial obligation until death pays the company from a company insurance policy on which the company has a lien.

When labor gets but a scant fraction of its productiveness there the essence of slavery lies -- When men willing to work and wanting to work are unable to find work and must compete with other workers for the privilege of producing wealth in order to acquire that sufficient for the barest necessities, there the substance of slavery lies.

Where malnutrition and undernourishment leave human beings susceptible to disease and death, there the soul-rotting kernal of slavery still exists.

We have not abolished slavery. We have retained it in its most insidious form in a form applicable to both White and Black.

We have not abolished slavery, we can never abolish slavery until we honestly accept the fundamental truths asserted in the Declaration of Independence, and secure to all the equal and unalienable rights with which all men were endowed by their creator.

Those rights mentioned in the Declaration of Independence -- Those rights referred to in Lincoln's Gettysburg address.

Now, my friends, in these times we hear a great deal about rights: Rights of the people, States rights, county rights, city rights, rights of free speech, rights of free press, all sorts and conditions of rights. Yet the most fundamental, the most basic right that transcends all and every other right is completely ignored even by those who profess to be the champions of the masses and defenders of the workers.

The right to the land. The land from which all wealth is produced. Without which no food, no clothing, no production - agrarian or industrial - could be possible, the source of all nourishment, the supply of all substance for life and comfort, the beginning and the ending of the

alpha and omega of all material existence. The land.

Whose land? Is it your land, is it my land? In America

does this land belong to the Americans or to some Americans --

In England does it belong to the Englishmen or to some

Englishmen -- In France, Italy, Germany, yes, and in the

Soviet Union, does the land of these countries belong to the

people who must live on and from the soil? Not only farm land

but land for farm, factory, filling station, hot dog stand,

and shoe shine parlor; land to produce wealth, land from which,

and only from which wealth can be brought forth.

We followers of Henry George never can get very far without mentioning Robinson Crusoe, and being a true Georgist, I am going to follow suit. We all remember how Robinson Crusoe after saving the life of Friday from his enemies, took Friday unto himself as a slave. Friday worked, produced wealth, came and went at the bidding of Crusoe and performed identically as slaves perform for their masters in all other sorts and conditions of history. Now let us suppose that Robinson said to Friday here is a proclamation of emancipation, guaranteeing to you absolute freedom, also here is a copy of

the 13th amendment that tells you that you and your posterity will forever be free from bondage. I congratulate you, Friday, upon obtaining your liberty. Then let us suppose that Robinson Crusoe said to Friday, now my good man, oh, excuse me, my fellow man, you are free, but this island on which we live belongs to me, and if you want to work to keep alive - and the only way you can keep alive, is by working on this land, you must pay me a portion of the fruits of your labor. Now, I don't feel like working any more but you are strong and healthy and you ~~should~~ ~~produce~~ ~~enough~~ ~~for~~ ~~both~~ ~~of~~ ~~us~~ ~~and~~ ~~you~~ ~~should~~ ~~produce~~ ~~more~~ ~~for~~ ~~me~~ ~~than~~ ~~you~~ ~~would~~ ~~for~~ ~~yourself~~ ~~if~~ ~~not~~ ~~there's~~ ~~the~~ ~~sea~~ ~~-~~ ~~its~~ ~~yours~~ ~~to~~ ~~swim~~ ~~away~~ ~~in~~ ~~but~~ ~~if~~ ~~you~~ ~~want~~ ~~a~~ ~~boat~~ ~~you'll~~ ~~have~~ ~~to~~ ~~pay~~ ~~me~~ ~~for~~ ~~the~~ ~~tree~~ ~~from~~ ~~which~~ ~~it~~ ~~is~~ ~~made~~.

Friday would be just as much a slave after the reading of the proclamation as he was before.

Henry George states in his book SOCIAL PROBLEMS, "The

unalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness involves the right of each to the free use of his powers in making a living for himself and his family, limited only by the equal rights of others. Any recognition of life and liberty without the rights of a man to the full fruits of his labor would be a mockery."

No one has the right to own land; any one has the right to use land, but if he uses it he must ^{use} it to the fullest productivity of that land and under no circumstances should he be allowed to deny any other man the right to put that land to the fullest limit of its productivity.

Land, my friends, is not property. Property is that which has been the result of labor in production and constitutes the only rightful property. Land never did and never will belong rightfully to any individual. The value of a piece of land is due to two causes. Either the bounty of nature or the influence of society but never to an individual. Of course, there are cases where individuals have improved land and in so doing the fruits of the production from the land rewarded

them for their efforts but it was only when other individuals and still other individuals congregated about the land and its desirability grew that its productivity induced and augmented by the increase of population that the value of the land arose. Did the individual make this land valuable? He did not. The first thing that ^{did} he/was to quit producing on that land and exact a greater and greater share of that productivity from those to whom he leased the land.

They used to call slaves property. Abraham Lincoln time after time in his addresses spoke of the property in slaves in the South amounting to a thousand million dollars. Human beings property, human flesh placed at a price like so much meat or manure. The very thought is revolting and we shudder to think that there was ever a time in the history of this free nation that ~~living~~ beings ~~manix~~ were valued in dollars and cents. Yet we are perpetuating a situation that embodies practically all

all of the evils of slavery and extends them to every race and color.

Trace the decay in any branch of our economic tree. The germs of corruption that spread to every twig and stem all lead to the rot at the roots. The good earth supplies rich nourishment but this disease at the base poisons the sap that flows to the crown and instead of having a majestic spread of leaf and limb we find a gnarled and dwarfed monstrosity that receives little food itself but feeds the parasites that is permitted to remain will eventually destroy the tree.

Now at this stage of my talk a great many of you must be saying "What is this guy up to any way? Does he say that the only way to solve the economic situation is for people like me who have slaved a lifetime to get hold of a house and a little piece of land are going to have to give that up to the state? My friends, were that the idea upon which the Georgists movement is based it would be the last economic idea to which I would subscribe. In the earlier

of my talk I said that the holder of land must put it to its best productive use. In all probability your house wherever it is, is now being put to its best productive use.

The individual home owner is one of the main concerns of the Georgist movement and he would be one of the greatest beneficiaries were the Georgist program to be put into practice. How this would come about is too great a subject for me to cover this evening were I to devote my entire talk to that faze alone.

The Georgist movement is one to abolish completely speculation in land. To stop the strangulating practice that permits one man to get his hands upon valuable land and to refuse to all other men permission to produce wealth there unless he pay the land owner a kings ransome for the privilege of applying his labor to the land. And my friends, that is the only way in which wealth can be produced. All wealth comes from the application of labor on land, and the land in America is owned by five percent of the population. Of course you must bear in mind that when

a man has a farm worth five thousand dollars and he has a mortgage on it for three thousand he does not own the farm. Five percent own the land. All wealth comes from the land through the labor applied to it. SD if the other ninety five percent of the population wants to exert its efforts on the land in order to produce that wealth the only way they can do it is by paying not the value of the land, but its anticipated value, or what the land ought to be worth fifty years from now. Either this, or by mortgaging the fruits of that labor for generations.

Here is the picture. In all new territory since the the first pilgrims landed, and insignificant portion of the land was used. The rest was held out for speculation. At first the holder produced from the land, and then as values increased he quit production because he could get others to produce on that land and all he had to do was to sit back and collect a portion of the production. As time went on and others came to produce there and the land values grew he continued to exact greater and greater portions of the

product. Even as he died in the beginning others continued to do as the press of population increased. But each ensuing group coming to new territories profited by the experience of the first settlers and held larger and larger sections of land out of use for speculation more and more rapidly driving population as it grew to lesser and lesser productive lands. One of my students tells me of his grandfather who went out on one of the later land grants. The first thing he did was to spend a day or two to build a shack, and two years to build a fence. All that time he did not produce any wealth except the fence, yet all of that time he kept others from coming in and producing wealth. This has continued to happen until the entire country is all taken up. There is no more free land. The last bit was taken out of use in 1935.

There is no more free land but there is enough land in America to house the population of the entire world fifty times over. Pardon me, did I say America? I'm sorry; I meant the United States. Yes, right here in these United

States where ridiculous laws and half witted organizations bleat stupid tommyrot about not allowing foreigners into America, there is room to accomodate comfortably the population of the world fifty times, and there would be food, clothing, and shelter and work for all of them. BUT LAND MUST BE MADE FREE IN ORDER TO DO THIS.

Now, how are we going to make land free? Are we going to take title away from everybody and say here, whoever wants this land can have it. Well, ~~is~~ that ~~were~~ the case I'd make a bid for #1, Wall St.

No, my friends, we plan to leave title in the hands of whomever will put that land to its fullest economic use, BUT if it is not put to its fullest economic use, the holder will have to pay the same rental, not tax, to the community as if that land were put to its fullest economic use. The entire RENT, and there is only one Rent; that is, the amount paid for the use of land. The amount paid for the use of a building is interest or return for the use of capital. Now this land rent, and I repeat for emphasis that rent only accrues to land, indicages its land value and the land value

can only be created by the community and therefore to the community it belongs. But if Mr. Speculator has to pay the same tax or rent on a block of empty lots that he would if there were modern buildings on it, do you think he would continue to hold it out of use for speculation? We wish he would; he'd go broke in a year and then the land would revert to the state for taxes, and Mr. Producer would come on, pay the economic rent and proceed to build that block of lots up to their economic productiveness in order that a profit might be realized from his investment. The three thousand empty lots would be covered up on Manhattan Island. The countless thousands of lots would be built on in the five boroughs. Where only nineteen per cent of the land in Manhattan is built up to its value (that is where the value of the buildings is equal to the value of the land), the entire city would have buildings of the same or greater value as the land.

And now get ready for a shock. About ninety percent of our frontier would be thrown open in America. All of these countless millions of acres of land that are held

out of use for speculation, and upon which no one will now produce wealth because the price would make production unprofitable would be open for use to any who wanted to apply himself.

I cannot in the time allotted to me go into detail as to how this thing would come about, but let it suffice that there was never a serious depression as long as there were frontiers to open. Well, what do you think would happen if these ninety percent of our frontiers were to be opened in such a manner that only the normal press of population would close them and that would take endless eternities.

Labor free to apply itself to land. Land anywhere for anything. Land for a factory, land for a farm, for a house or hot dog stand, land for an apartment house or a cottage, a repair shop or a restaurant; but land upon which the economic rent and not the speculative rent is to be paid. And selling price is nothing but rent capitalized. Economic rent would be high only where land is very desirable, and where the productivity would determine

the rental price. Which would mean home sites, farm sites, small business sites all would be free, or practically free.

With all of this production going on, with people producing wealth - wealth without having to contribute such a tremendous portion of their earnings to landlords- how would labor stand? Actually capital would be competing with ~~ee~~ capital for the services of labor, and when that happens it is impossible to exploit and enslave labor, especially when at any time labor can tell capital to go chase itself, that he has free land where he can apply his efforts to the land and produce wealth without the payment of rent, or at most a trivial economic rent instead of an exorbitant speculative rent.

And finally with land values taxed to the fullest economic value, every other tax, tarriff, every other fine that is placed upon the products of labor would be wiped out. No gas tax, not sales tax, no income tax, none of the thousand direct taxes and the insidious indirect taxes that are placed upon the products of labor would remain in practice. Think what a penalty we must pay

every time we produce wealth. Improve your house, you're taxed; employ labor, you're taxed; every time the wheels of production are set into motion they must operate from ten to twenty percent of their time to grind out taxes.

They call us Single Taxers. I say we stand for no tax at all. Collect the rent of the land and there will (and you can figure it out for yourself) hundred of millions of dollars of surplus in the treasury each year even with all of these tax collecting bureaus still on the pay roll.

This, my friends, is the economy of freedom, and when there is economic freedom political freedom ensues, and when there is economic and political freedom sociological freedom will follow as inevitably as night superceeds day.

At the Henry George School we take this thing up from every angle. We, after the reasoning and advice of Henry George, follow the truth wherever it leads, and it leads us to the conclusion that there is no conflict between

labor and capital, that wars depressions and the persistence of poverty are all directly traceable to two great evils, speculation in land and taxation of the products of labor. Logically and openly in class where all discussion is welcomed and analyzed we reach these conclusions and seek no converts. Unless absolute reason leads the student to conviction then conversion is futile.

We welcome anyone and everyone to the school. There is no fee for the tuition in a fifteen week course in the fundamental principles of political economy. Our teachers teach for nothing and the school is supported by the nickles and dimes and quarters of those who graduating, are convinced that the remedy is an economy of freedom and that we are a nation dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Created, my friends, by God and God alone, whoever that God may be, and that man and man alone can cause the inequality. Land, my friends, is created by God --- the land the Lord our God gave unto all of us, not some of us --- and where land is free a govern-

of the people, for the people, and by the people, *cannot*
born the earth