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The Menace of Privilege

A Study of the Dangers to the Republic from the Existence of a Favored Class

By HENRY GEORGE, JR.

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FROM THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This volume strives to show in a brief, suggestive way how privileges granted or sanctioned by government underlie the social and political, mental and moral, manifestations that appear so ominous in the republic. The monopoly of natural opportunities, heavy taxes upon production, private ownership of public highways and other lesser privileges, cause the great inequalities in the distribution of wealth which are evident all about. For these are not powers to produce wealth, but powers to appropriate it.

This inequality in distribution causes the formation in the community of two clearly marked and powerful classes with distinct views and mutually hostile feelings. One of them is lifted into superabundance and the weaknesses and vices that spring from it, while within that class is born the spirit of superiority and the feeling that the "work people" were created expressly to work for it.

The "work people," composing the great body of the population, constitute the opposing class. Cut off by monopoly from free access to natural opportunities, and robbed of and taxed on the fruits of their labor at every turn, they have been reduced to an intense competition for a living. In the skilled trades they have organized into unions to control the supply of their kind of labor, in order to keep

up and, if possible, increase its price. This organization for defense brings a power for offense that, governed by a narrow or unscrupulous spirit, may be exercised in opposition to general public rights.

There have, therefore, risen up in the nation two great, belligerent elements: leagued privileges on the one side, labor unionism on the other. When Privilege cannot make terms with this labor unionism, by which it may peacefully rob the public, it makes war against it. Its chief weapons are soldiers and an extraordinary development of the judicial enjoining order.

And not only to help in this, but to protect and extend the favors that are its life, Privilege further endeavors to control politics by corruption, and to influence public opinion through purchase or intimidation of the press and through gifts to the university and the pulpit.

All this leads to the centralization of government and to foreign aggression, and reveals in the republic startling parallels with great nations which, after brilliant development, entered upon the path of ruin and death. . . .

Yet this volume is not an outcry of pessimism. It is a word of warning, but also of hope. . . . The republic rightly boasts of great achievements, and it has in reserve power for great things to come.

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