

Henry George School: Introducing Students To A Multitude Of Sins

By JOHN HUGHES

Draw upon 200 years of the free market theory of capitalism, add a heavy dose of Socratic questioning, stir in the trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, apply fierce competition and peer pressure, spice it with lying, cheating, spying, and counter-espionage, add a touch of applied sadism and swindle questions, and mix for six years until reduced to a fine art.

Done correctly, what results is a means of popularizing the study of political economics based on the teachings of American economist Henry George.

Offered as a course for high school students and designed by the Henry George School of Los Angeles, this unique program is administered by Harry Pollard of Tujunga.

Pollard, a London-born Briton and president of the school, runs the buildingless school from his home off Blanchard Canyon.

"Political economics," explains Pollard, "covers a whole multitude of sins."

Those sins are the basic social relationships of the natural social order of man, known in high school as social studies.

"We try to teach the general concepts which apply to a myriad of examples," said Pollard.

INTERSTUDENT PROGRAM

Called the Interstudent Program, the courses are sold on a subscription basis to high schools across the state and the nation.

The Los Angeles school is affiliated with three other Henry George Schools which are located in San Diego, Sacramento, and San Francisco and comprise the Henry George Schools of California.

There are schools in several other states with the original school located in New York. Each school operates as an independent

facility promulgating the popularized scientific study of political economics advanced by Henry George in the late 1800's.

While many of the schools direct their efforts towards offering adult classes, the Los Angeles school directs its attention towards the high schools.

"We have concentrated almost all our efforts in this area," said Pollard. "We have done very little towards adult education and have pulled right out of the colleges because of our limited resources."

The interest in high school students, according to Pollard, is an outgrowth of participation in Earth Day demonstrations in 1970.

"We discovered kids didn't know how to learn," said Pollard.

CONCEPTS, NOT FACTS

"In the schools," he explained, "they fill the kids heads up with masses and masses of facts which would be better left in the library books. It would be better if they taught them general concepts and showed them methods and ways to find out whatever they want."

"For instance," said Pollard, "if you have a problem with plumbing. You go down to the library and check out a book on plumbing and you read it and find out what you need to know. When you are finished you put the book back until the next time a plumbing problem comes up."

"That can be done with almost anything," said Pollard. Based on this principle, the Interstudent mini-courses designed by Pollard and the Henry George School deal with people, how they are and how they act.

"This is why our programs are so effective," said Pollard, "because the kids don't have to be told this is what you have to learn. They pick up concepts."

The concepts, says Pollard, are simple, basic, and very old.

One basic premise brought out early in the course is that man seeks to satisfy his desires.

"This is the reason why he keeps going all the time," said Pollard. "He satisfies one set of desires as another comes up to take their place."

"The second basic

assumption," explained Pollard, "is man seeks to satisfy his desires with the least exertion."

EVERYONE KNOWS THIS

"Again, you know this, I know this, and everyone knows this. But social studies have been taught all over North America which assume this isn't so. In fact, we even have a guilt complex for when we try to be purposely lazy," said Pollard. "It isn't lazy. It is the reason you invent a better mouse trap."

"We move on from that to people who tend not to disadvantage themselves. They tend to do things which are to their advantage," explained Pollard.

"The kids learn there is a certain sense in cooperation," he said. "It enables you to satisfy more desires."

Drawing from 200 years of the free market theory of capitalism, Pollard's mini-courses utilize several methods of teaching including use of the medieval trivium and Socratic questioning.

MEDIEVAL TRIVIUM

"As we found the kids so ill-equipped to do almost anything, we brought in the ideas of the trivium," explained Pollard.

"The trivium made sense because the medieval monks thought that before you learned anything you should first learn how to learn. So they taught them three things: grammar, logic, and rhetoric."

"Grammar was the basic principles. Logic was putting these principles to use. And rhetoric," he explained, "was communication."

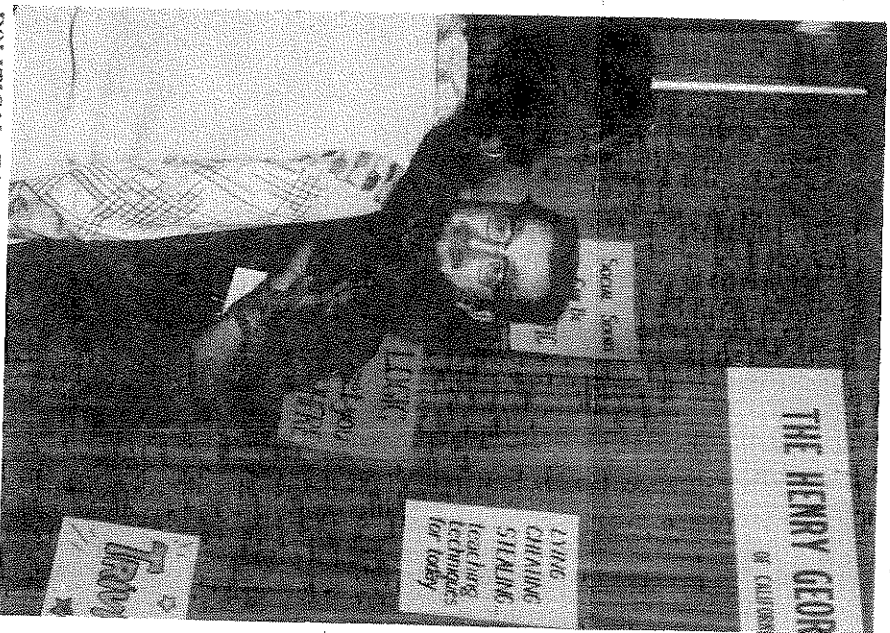
"The basic way of learning about the content comes from Socrates," said Pollard. "We use a heavy Socratic questioning."

"What happens is the students do a series of discussion questions with each set of discussion questions leading them in the direction of a concept they are to come across," said Pollard.

"When we teach politics," he explained, "we don't talk about Democrats and Republicans, but rather what is the difference between a 100 per cent vote in order to pass something and say a 51 per cent, a simple majority."

"They soon learn a 51 per cent vote will get a lot of things passed but a lot of

POLITICAL ECONOMIST and president of the Henry George School of Los Angeles Harry Pollard works out of his Tujunga home developing high school courses designed to popularize social studies classes based on the teachings of American economist Henry George.



people will not be happy with it. And a 100 per cent you won't get very much passed, but when they are passed everyone is in favor of it," said Pollard.

This, he explains, leads to a discussion of what the voting majority should be. What would satisfy the most people yet allow the government to continue to function?"

NOT DISCUSSED IN BOOKS

"This is the kind of thing which is discussed and I don't know where else it is discussed in their books or anywhere," said Pollard. Concepts brought out are also related to current events.

"Socialism for example," said Pollard. "We take no stand on socialism, although we are teaching a completely free market theory."

Pollard explains that through questions which establish models of the system the students are asked the effects.

"When you get the best producer and the poorest producer and those in between producing less, the next question would be, 'Does your society have a better or poorer chance of surviving next winter?'" said Pollard.

"In this fashion," he said, "we are really

analyzing the failure of the crops in Russia and the failure of the economy in Great Britain.

"It is just a series of question," added Pollard. "We are dealing with concepts."

As the students progress in the direction of the general concepts being studied, he is asked specially designed questions.

SWINDLE QUESTIONS

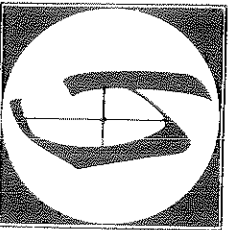
"It is a swindle type question," explained Pollard. "They are given an either or question and neither of them is correct. Or they are asked to list not more than five examples of something when there are no examples. Everyone they list they lose."

"The marking is vicious, too," said Pollard. "If they get something right they get a point. But if they get it wrong they lose two of the points they already have."

Laughing, Pollard adds, "This is all sadism, as you realize."

"All we are doing to them essentially is teaching them about adult life so they can leave high school and get into the adult world with some ability to handle themselves."

The Interstudent courses are not easy. As the course rule book points out,



interstudent

PEER PRESSURE

"Interstudent frontrunners rarely achieve continuous success. Best grades go to those who recover well from defeat.

"This necessary toughness," the book explains, "is not always found in straight A students, yet it is important in real life."

Motivation can be a problem in any learning situation and with a course as abstract and demanding as the Interstudent mini-course the problem would be expected to be momentous.

Not so, according to Pollard who explains the students are put into groups where their grade depends not only on their own effort but the effort of every individual in the group.

"They learn in their group that cooperation wins," explained Pollard. "It tells them you are going to win by cooperating."

SPY, CHEAT, AND STEAL. "We put them into tremendously competitive situations in which they can spy on each other, cheat, and steal," he explained. "They can do any of these things, and if they come up with some inspired cheating they are indeed given a higher grade."

"We have a peculiar situation which arises, though, because they are not cheating the system, or the school, or the teacher," said Pollard. "They learn right away that the way to avoid having a car stolen is to leave the key out of the lock and not leave it in the car."

"In other words," he said, "in any free society you first have to take care of yourself. You mustn't complain if someone steals something from you. You should take better care of it."

The fierceness of the competition is added to through the introduction of a weekly trivia debate between the groups.

Each group, having chosen a topic to defend is challenged to research the topic, present it, and defend it against the other groups.

"This is not an ordinary debate," explained Pollard. "This is an alley cat debate where each group gets up and contends one of the subjects and supports its arguments while the other groups attempt to cream them."

Pollard explains that cream is not only descriptive of what happens but the technical term used to describe catching an opponent either conceding a previous statement, making an error of fact, or failing to answer.

their work.

Pollard explains they often come up to the teacher and say, "Help. I've got a bunch of dumbos. What am I going to do?" To this the teacher replies that if he can get the group to work together and do better than would be normally expected, then he can earn extra points for his effort.

This, said Pollard, demonstrates what happens to every bright person when he enters the adult world and not only gives him an idea of what to expect but a way of dealing with it.

A FINE ART The Interstudent mini-course, or units as they are also called, are filled with innovations designed to not only teach concepts but how to deal with "the outside world." Most of the innovations, Pollard explains, come from teachers who have participated in the program.

"We now have it to sort of a fine art," said Pollard. The Henry George School is a non-profit institution. Courses are sold on a yearly subscription basis which is renewable at 50 per cent the starting price. Prices range between \$10, for a complete mini-unit and reprint rights for classroom use, to \$125, for a departmental subscription which includes enough material for 550 students.

"We make no money on this, but we try to break even," said Pollard, adding "We seldom do."

While the present efforts of the school are directed towards providing high school students with a new understanding of the social sciences, the school has also been involved with adult education.

"Adults are worse than kids," said Pollard. "They get tricked as easily, if not more so, than the kids. They are not used to going from A to B to C in a train of logic."

Plans to begin offering adult courses are in the works, and Pollard feels it is possible they could begin by January.

The Henry George School is also responsible for putting on a state-wide social studies conference for teachers where current California questions are discussed.

Pollard, himself, not only runs the Los Angeles school but also is responsible for a correspondence course; has written a book, "The Classical Analysis," and

edits the school's monthly publication, Insight.

ENGINEER, TURNED ECONOMIST Pollard, who moved to America in 1962 from Canada, is, by formal education, not an economist. He is a graduate of the Paddington Technical College with a degree in engineering. He also studied physics at London University.

A former chairman of the London League of Young Liberals, member of the council of the National Liberal Party, and one-time candidate for council in a parliamentary general election, Pollard became interested in the teachings of Henry George after attending a class after getting out of the RAF.

From one class, Pollard went on to study and eventually to teach at the London Henry George School. He moved from that job to the Canadian School of Economic Science in 1956, eventually to become director of the school.

Pollard became a president of the Los Angeles Henry George School in 1962.

His work at the school, he explains, is directed towards teaching people how to think, not what to think.

Within his work all

*Reprinted from:
The Record-Ledger (Tujunga)
July 14th, 1976.*

The second most important thing about INTERSTUDENT is that it's fun. Of much greater importance is it's scientific treatment of human behavior. The contentions of the analysis can be verified by the everyday experiences of the student. As the analysis is concerned with fundamentals, it can be part of any study dealing with people, including history.

Although INTERSTUDENT began as a High School Program, an adult variation is available for home study. The basic Mini-Units may be completed by correspondence, or through regularly scheduled group discussion.

The Henry George Schools of California



Interstudent

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problems can be resolved into simple elements from which solutions can be found. The problem, he explains, is not what solution to apply but what exactly the problem is.

He applies this principle to modern-day issues and is outspoken on his conclusions.

DDTBAN

Speaking of a radio broadcast he made once on the subject of the effects of DDT and its banning, he said, "One woman accused me of putting the ecology movement back 15 years. I figured since that was a 15-minute commentary I wasn't doing too badly, so I looked still further and the result was incredible."

"It looks as if the banning of DDT was really a triumph for social science over natural science," said Pollard, adding, "Witchcraft prevails so to speak."

Pollard says he is not as much interested in converting individuals to his personal opinions as he is interested in "planting an irritant" in their minds from which "a pearl of understanding can develop."

This is the basis for Pollard's teaching as it was for Henry George who once wrote:

"For the study of political economy you need no special knowledge, no extensive library, no costly laboratory. You do not even need textbooks nor teachers, if you will but think for yourselves."