

The Business Beat

Report from Chicago

Henry George Fundamentals Revivified

By **ROBERT C. NELSON**, Staff Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

A dozen top-level Chicago executives and a reporter settled back in the warmly conservative private dining room of the Union League Club. Supper had been sumptuous, and now the after-meal discussion promised to be equally satisfying.

And it was.

For more than 1½ hours the businessmen and an able discussion leader—a professor of economics—talked frankly about achieving harmonious labor relations, how to increase productivity, reduce costs, eliminate burdensome taxation, cut governmental red tape, extend profitable markets, keep production going without periodic slowdowns and crackups, and how to achieve an atmosphere of freedom with incentives for the fullest use of creative faculties of all—labor and management.

How Henry George would have delighted in the evening. How proud he would have been of the forthright manner in which these businessmen talked about their companies and the importance of broadened understanding of basic economic principles. Henry George certainly would have grinned approvingly because his fame as economist and social philosopher stemmed from just this kind of inquiry into what he came to call the law of human progress.

He studied and wrote about economic philosophy throughout most of the last half of the 19th century. He examined the economic and social problems of industrial society. He studied what the classical economists had said. He watched the American economy expand.

He was particularly disturbed by the trends he perceived leading the nation toward increasingly centralized controls and boundless taxation. And he worked to develop in his thinking a philosophy of freedom indigenous to America as an answer to the collectivist theories of the Old World.

He saw the necessity of removing restrictive taxation on production and allowing the fullest incentives for use of the best land sites and natural resources of the nation.

Thus it was not surprising that in 1934, the inspiration of Henry George's philosophies, just as moving as they had been before his passing in 1897, led his followers in Chicago to establish an extension of a Henry George School of Social Science which had been chartered two

years earlier in New York City.

In 1935, John Lawrence Monroe, whose father had directed a Henry George Lecture Association from 1903 to 1929, became director of the Chicago school. Having traveled with his father for these lectures, John Monroe also was imbued with the importance of understanding economic principles as a first step in solving basic problems of industry, the individual, and the community.

In his 25 years of service, Mr. Monroe has guided more than 17,000 persons in Henry George study groups, arranged lectures, dinners, and conferences—all in this unique program to focus thinking about economics.

These works have won for him not only the respect of the Chicago business-industrial-financial community, but its genuine affection as well. More than 100 companies have taken part in study programs. The school—a not-for-profit operation—is financed largely by the participating contributions of these companies plus sustaining contributions from other interested companies and foundations.

There are branches of the Henry George School in 18 major cities of the United States and Canada, and overseas extensions in England, Denmark, the Union of South Africa, Australia, and Jamaica.

In each, the study method is clear and similar:

¶ Respect the integrity of the individual mind.

¶ Ask no one to accept a conclusion unverified by his own observation and untested by his own reason.

¶ Keep thinking wide open

where the evidence is slender and the facts few.

¶ Utilize in the realm of economic inquiry the same laboratory means of establishing principles and arriving at conclusions as have opened storehouses of knowledge in the physical sciences and harnessed for mankind the physical forces of nature.

Recently, John Monroe took a moment to consider the satisfactions of work with this Henry George School activity. One recent graduating study group, at an airline headquarters here, impressed him, he said, because of the great "mutual love the participants showed for each other and for mankind" despite the great variety in their ethnic, skill, and education backgrounds.

And he also recalled the study group of union and management representatives—all from a single company—who had become near-enemies during weeks of company-union strife.

"During those first sessions we all were wondering just who would get hurt first," Mr. Monroe recalls. "But after five sessions you couldn't tell management from labor. Each man had turned away from personal grievances to a common search for basic principles."

"It seemed to me," says John Monroe reflectively, "that first they stopped being afraid of each other and then at the end of the course they had even stopped being afraid of the world. I guess that is my satisfaction, seeing others grasp the infinite potential of the individual and the universe."

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