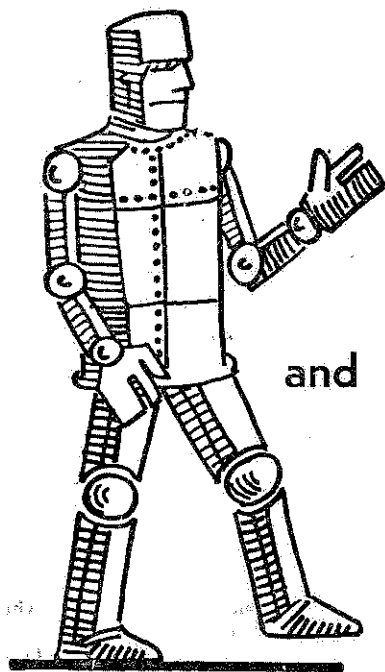


HENRY GEORGE



and

The ROBOT

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## Henry George and the Robot

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN in a Robot Age? What would happen in a Push-Button Age? You press the button and a machine does the rest. Labor-saving machinery perfected to near the vanishing point where almost no labor is required. Would this be the Golden Age that men are working for? Would the perfecting of labor-saving machinery help the workers as was expected of universal education?

The last century was marked by a prodigious increase in wealth-producing power. At the beginning of this marvelous era it was expected that labor-saving inventions would lighten the toil and improve the condition of the laborer; that this would make real poverty and dire want a thing of the past . . . Plainly, in the sight of the imagination, this labor-saving machinery would elevate society from its very foundations; these muscles of iron and sinews of steel would make the poorest laborer's life a holiday . . . And beyond this one would see moral conditions realizing the Golden Age of which mankind has always dreamed . . . How could the vice, the crime, the ignorance, the brutality, that spring from poverty, exist where poverty had vanished? Who should crouch where all were freemen; Who oppress where all were peers?\*

The Robot Age is but a refinement of what is stated above. Where the typesetting machine took the place of hand setting of type the "Tele-type" typesetter

is taking the place of the human operator (to mention only one instance of near-Robot installation) and the men in the printing trades are wondering about their jobs—their only refuge—under our present (monopolistic) system being jobless insurance and old age pensions. "Life begins at forty" writes one author, with more truth than even he thought. Men are refused jobs at the age of forty years and above. In the far west the age for throwing men on the economic scrap heap is 32 years. Men with college diplomas are "a dime a dozen"; below that grade young men are simply "machines in overalls" on the production line.

It is quite evident that labor-saving machinery, the Robot Age carrying it to the *n*th degree, increases the "wealth of nations" immensely. But if the producers, the workers with head and hand, do not get their fair share of this wealth, where does it go?

The socialist says that it goes to the "Capitalist" as "Profit",† a surplus product. The communist says "Some rich man gets it, and I want it". But what is the true answer?

The true answer is that this disappearing wealth goes as Taxes and Land Rent—mainly that portion of Land Rent which is termed Monopoly Rent in political economy.

Labor cannot reap the benefits which advancing civilization brings, because they are intercepted. Land being absolutely necessary to labor, and being subject to monopolization (yielding monopoly rent) and speculation (yielding speculative rent)

every increase in the productive power of labor but increases Land Rent—the price that labor must pay for the “opportunity” to utilize its powers; and thus all the advantages gained by the march of progress go to the owners of the land, and wages do not increase in purchasing power, no matter what the nominal amount in steadily inflated money values. Wages cannot increase in purchasing power; for the greater earnings of labor the greater the price that labor must pay out of its earnings for the “opportunity” to make any earnings at all . . . And thus robbed of all the benefits of the increase in productive power, labor is exposed to certain effects of advancing civilization which, without the advantages that naturally accompany them, are positive evils, and of themselves tend to reduce the free laborer to the helpless and degraded condition of the slave.†

The only ray of hope is this. There is just one tax that does not fall on Labor or the products of labor; one tax that “stays put”, that cannot be shifted and thus does not add to the cost of living—and that is the tax on Land Rent, actual and potential.§ The solution of the basic problems of our troubled times, with the menace of communism and the encroachment of socialism, is relatively simple. Free the land of cities, countrysides, agricultural, mining lands of MONOPOLY, and the blessings of Liberty will flow therefrom. This is the natural cure for a sick and cancerous society. Let Freedom ring.

—C. LeB. G.

\*Progress and Poverty, Introduction. † p. 161. ‡ p. 283. § p. 166, cloth, \$1.00 postpaid, Schalkenbach Foundation, 50 E. 69th St., New York City, 21.