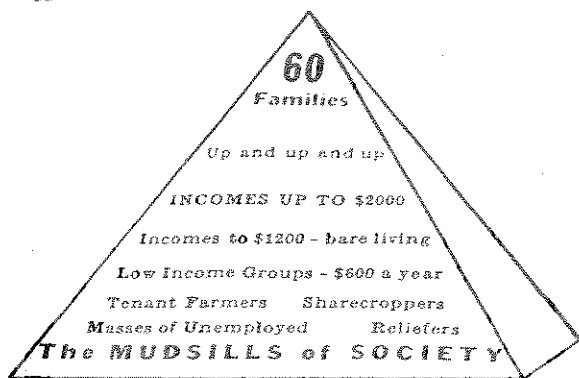


Henry George's Social Pyramid

It is at last becoming evident that the enormous increase in productive power which has marked the present century and is still going on with accelerating motion, has no tendency to extirpate poverty or to lighten the burdens of those compelled to toil. It simply widens the gulf between Dives and Lazarus, and makes the struggle for existence more intense.



C. LeBaron Goeller—1941

Just as closer settlement and greater utilization of labor-saving machinery make possible greater economies in production and exchange and wealth in consequence increases, not merely in the aggregate, but in proportion to population—so does poverty take on a darker aspect. Some get an infinitely better and easier living, but others find it hard to get a living at all.

The new forces, elevating in their nature though they be, do not act upon the social fabric from underneath, but strike at a

point intermediate between top and bottom. It is as though an immense wedge were being forced, not underneath society, but through society. Those who are above the point of separation are elevated, but those who are below are crushed down.

This association of poverty with progress is the great enigma of our times. It is the riddle which the Sphinx of Fate puts to our civilization, and which not to answer is to be destroyed. To educate men who must be condemned to poverty, is but to make them restive; to base on a state of most glaring social inequality political institutions under which men are theoretically equal, is to stand a pyramid on its apex.

What has destroyed every previous civilization has been the tendency to the unequal distribution of wealth and power. This same tendency, operating with increasing force, is observable in our civilization today, showing itself in every progressive community, and with greater intensity the more progressive the community. Wages and interest tend constantly to fall, rent to rise, the rich to become very much richer, the poor to become more helpless and hopeless, and the middle class to be swept away.

Industrial depressions, which cause as much waste and suffering as famine or wars, are like the twinges and shocks which precede paralysis. Everywhere it is evident that the tendency to inequality, which is the necessary result of material progress where land is monopolized, cannot go much further without carrying our civilization into that downward path which is so easy to enter and so hard to abandon.

Consider how, in the present condition of things even the fortunate few who stand upon the apex of the social pyramid must suffer, though they know it not, from the want, ignorance and degradation that are underneath. To remove want and the fear of want, to give to all classes leisure, and comfort, and independence, the decencies and refinements of life, the opportunities of mental and moral development, would be like turning water into a desert. . . . It is the culmination of Christianity—the City of God on earth, with its walls of jasper and its gates of pearl! It is the reign of the Prince of Peace!—Henry George, in *Progress and Poverty*. (Selections and arrangement by C. LeB.G.)

Progress and Poverty (\$1.00 a copy, postpaid) and other books by Henry George may be obtained from the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation,
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