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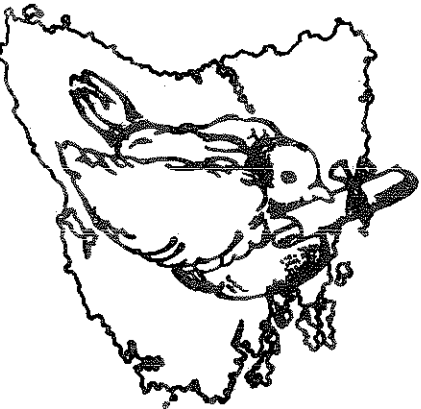
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No 7

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THE GOOD SOCIETY!



Between August 20 and 25 1979 the Henry George Associations of many countries of the world met at San Francisco to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the publication of the book *Progress and Poverty*.

This book, written by Henry George, was first published in San Francisco in 1879. It met with tremendous success — two million copies sold within the first two years of publication, and was hailed as a masterpiece of clear thought and splendid style. That was 100 years ago. But who knows about it today, who knows of Henry George today? For what was Henry George famous in his days and what is this masterpiece all about? Some 250 delegates from widely dispersed countries found it important to come together to exchange views on these and many other questions.

Henry George was of humble American origin. At 14 years of age he went out into the world to fend for himself. In those days, the same as today, it was not easy to find a job. But worse, there were no employment agencies, no Government supports and no job training establishments. It was tougher than today.

Henry went to sea, managed to learn to read and write and in his early twenties he found a position with a firm of printers. Thus he became familiar with the use and value of words. Quite early he observed the difference between rich and poor and it struck him in particular that, whilst there was obviously an abundance of all good things in the world, this abundance was not shared by all humankind.

Being religious by nature and blessed with many gifts from astute critical logic to an unshakable sense of justice, from convincing rhetoric to a deep insight into the values of human life, he set out to devote his life to political economy and social philosophy.

From his humble beginnings, he progressed to world renown in his time, and many of his friends and enemies ranked him next to Plato as one of the most profound thinkers of all times. Credit to his genius can be cited from many authorities, to mention just a few — Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Parkes, Woodrow Wilson, Bernard Shaw, Leo Tolstoy and, last but not least, all those excellent people who gathered at San Francisco last year, and who have kept the economic philosophies of Henry George alive over the last 50 years.

All this may sound impressive, but why has the average citizen not heard of, or learned about, Henry George? What economic axioms did he set up which brought fame to him in his lifetime and

solution to the conditions which create poverty? The essence here, as in medicine, is that one has to attempt to remove the cause of the evil, not the symptom. Poverty is not the cause of social distress, but only a symptom.

Henry George knew that too, and he could not only see the cause of poverty but could also clearly demonstrate how to remove it: he advocated a change of outlook (*Weltanschauung*), a change of morality, a different way of distributing wealth — not by force but by providing lawful facilities so that the opportunities would no longer exist to accumulate large amounts of wealth.

Basically, the proposition is to reduce all taxes on production — corporate — income — sales — wages — excise — property — taxes, etc., and to transfer all these on to land value taxation.

The reasoning behind this is that all forms of commodity taxation depress the living standard of humankind, whilst taxation of land does not. Land is the only commodity on this planet which we cannot produce.

However, all our products, whatever they are, come from land or the use of land. Whilst we live here we all have an unwritten right to the use and the benefits of this one commodity. Accumulation of land far beyond the needs of one individual, expropriates a fellow human being from similar such opportunities as enjoyed by the first.

Land speculation is probably the largest single contributor to today's inequalities in society. By taxing land, in particular unused land — land held for speculation — land prices will be forced down. This is opposite to the effect of taxing commodities: tax on commodities increases the price of commodities. So far, governments of any political shade are doing exactly this.

Here a quick word of warning: this is not a treatise on either the complete teachings of Henry George or on single tax. This is a complex matter and one which contributes to its unpopularity. Interested readers should do themselves justice by getting details from any of the existing Henry George Schools in the State capitals.

The proposition of changing from commodity taxation to land value taxation is an unpopular one — it is against our established habits. The small home owner and the small farmer feel themselves attacked without clearly understanding the issues involved. The large corporations, lending institutions, banks, or land developers know full well that such a move is directed against their traditional unearned (not deserved) income. To engage in such a change is politically unsound, therefore no government anywhere has ever dared to implement such a change.



Henry George was fully aware of these implications and difficulties, but he was a man of exceptional courage, integrity and faith, and with all his other qualities, he was capable of pronouncing his ideas and getting popular support.

With his death in 1897 the driving force behind all these new humanitarian concepts vanished — there was nobody to carry on the struggle for a peaceful and equitable change of the established social conditions. And that is where we are today.

During the past few years there has been a gradual increase in the number of Henry George followers. The Centennial Conference at San Francisco showed that

there are today a number of well established organizations carrying on the basic teachings of Henry George. That these organizations need unification to become effective has also become obvious.

Hopefully, they will be able to bring together individual interpretations of ideology to the benefit of a common platform. This will have to be a modernized version of classical thoughts, expressed in the idioms of the 21st century rather than those of the 18th or 19th centuries.

The need for economic change is becoming more urgent today than ever before. This change has to be non-violent, genuine and for the betterment of all, without taking away individual freedom or curtailing individual ability.

The benefit for effort exerted has to be restored to its true owner — the worker, regardless of his or her status. This is the crux of the proposition. The reasons for this are simple to see: we have today more of everything; science has produced changes within the last 10 — 20 — 50 years beyond imagination. Nearly everything can be manufactured — except for land. The benefit of this multitude of output, however, goes only to a small extent to those who have produced it.

More and more people see themselves left behind, feeling disadvantaged. In desperation, they resort to a great variety of assumed remedies for their plight: food, drink, gambling, and no desire for responsibility. All of these, unfortunately, are supported by the free profit motives of other members of our society who have the means and the interests to encourage these manifestations. Henry George saw these things in his days only too clearly. Read his books and see for yourself.

There is now a vicious circle in that the more we progress scientifically, materially, the more we develop the abilities for supplying the demands of humankind. These goods finally exploit the weaknesses of the poor to the benefit (?) of the rich. One only has to stroll through any big city to observe this cycle. Sydney is no exception but San Francisco is a classical example. Although *Progress and Poverty* was written while Henry George was in San Francisco, its philosophy, moral and practical teachings apply universally.

Whether or not the Centenary Conference will become the political-economic watershed for "More Progress and Less Poverty" only the future can tell. As an observer at this Conference one certainly is left with the impression that a strong neo-classical economic school is evolving which will invite the whole world to share in revised concepts of moral — economic — political theories.

The call will have to go to each world citizen and his or her response will decide the issue. Are we to struggle from depression to depression, from war to war, or are we going to have the courage and the honesty to let old, worn out concepts go, and have the strength to replace them with new, less ego-centric principles, suitable for a New Age?



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