

HENRY GEORGE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

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Speaker, Robert Clancy, Acting Director

(The talk takes 7 minutes - opening and closing announcements 3 minutes)

Narrator: Mr. Clancy, can you tell us something of the Henry George philosophy? How does it fit into the framework of present-day social thought?

Clancy: Well, first let's see what are the trends in social thought today. The various social and economic ideas that have some program to implement these ideas are usually characterized by the terms "right", "left", and "center".

First, we have the "right wing" or "conservatives". Partisans of this approach are satisfied with things as they are - or rather, as they have been. They look back to the good old days of untrammelled private enterprise and view with alarm the increase in "leftist" tendencies. Their approach has been called "laissez-faire" - although in contrast to the doctrine of true laissez-faire they are not at all unfriendly to the idea of government control - for their own benefit.

Narrator: What would you say are the shortcomings of this line of thought?

Clancy: The popular feeling seems to be that this approach has already had a century of application and has been found wanting. Things have not worked out so well. Disasters and depressions have followed one another in succession. The man at the bottom feels that this system has permitted the man at the top to keep him down. The immediate reaction has been to change the system. The "left wing" proposes a complete overhauling. Government ownership and control are to supplant private enterprise. Total planning is to replace the so-called "laissez-faire" system.

Narrator: And what are your thoughts on this approach?

Clancy: I think that most people feel that State control - under whatever name you choose - would only be substituting one evil for another. While people are not satisfied with things as they are, they realize that an enormous sacrifice of liberty is involved in total planning. Hence we have another alternative in social thought - what has been called "liberalism" -- varying from "center" to "left of center".

Narrator: Are you also critical of this approach?

Clancy: Well, to this extent -- liberalism, in contrast to both extreme right and left, doesn't seem to know what it wants.

Narrator: But since it seems to be our only other alternative, must we not come to some terms with liberalism?

Clancy: That's just the trouble -- it's scarcely an alternative. Those who call themselves liberals realize their weakness-- lack of a definite program. They have subjected themselves to a checking up, but still have not come up with a constructive program on which they can agree. Liberalism is floundering, vacillating between left and right. What do liberals want?

Narrator: True, they don't seem to be agreed on a program. But they seem to stand on common ground in certain things. They all want full employment, for instance.

Clancy: Yes, that is a fine ideal on which we can all agree. But how are we to attain it?

Narrator: Most liberals do say this much -- that the job of full employment ought to be done by a combination of private enterprise and government planning.

Clancy: This is typical of liberalism's vacillation between left and right -- between private enterprise and government control. They think production and employment ought to be planned but don't tell us how it can be done without leading all the way to total control. This attitude of contemporary liberalism is quite in contrast with nineteenth century liberalism which then advocated true laissez-faire -- which means a free field and no favors.

Narrator: Don't you think that liberals today may have turned away from this ideal because it seemed inadequate in the light of modern developments?

Clancy: My feeling is that they turned away from the ideal of laissez-faire without giving it a chance. We have never had a true laissez-faire system, free from privileges and monopoly control -- to say nothing of state control. Instead of seeking to remove these restrictions on freedom they assumed that full freedom was not safe -- and today they advocate all sorts of governmental restrictions. Most of the programs they have to offer -- short of complete state control -- would only involve more government spending, state-subsidized housing, employment, etc. More spending means more taxes. And while everybody would like to enjoy the benefits of more spending, nobody relishes the idea of more taxes.

Narrator: I see your point. But aren't the ideals of modern liberalism worth striving for -- the full employment goal, for instance?

Clancy: Of course they are. I don't think it requires a special philosophy to see the desirability of full employment. The big question is, how can it be done. This leads us, I think, to the heart of the issue. What we need is a sound economic analysis of society. The trouble is that we are offered all sorts of plans and programs without such analysis. When a machine breaks down we don't toss it into the junk-heap without first trying to find out why it has stopped working and whether it can be made to run smoothly. Why don't we do the same thing with our social structure?

Narrator: This sounds like a tremendous job with such a complicated machine, if we can call it that, as our social structure. How can we begin to probe and come up with results we can rely upon?

Clancy: It can be done if we understand and are guided by fundamentals. There are fundamentals and if we apply them rationally we can do the job as scientifically as we have done in other sciences.

Narrator: Has any start been made in this direction?

Clancy: Yes. The classical economists of the 18th and 19th centuries gave us the foundation for such a science. Henry George 70 years ago further developed the science. Present-day economists, instead of continuing this work, have abandoned these fundamentals and have gone off at various tangents -- one of these is the statistical approach, with no set of values. At the Henry George School we are getting back to these fundamentals.

Narrator: Well, to return to my first question, how does this approach tie in with present-day social thought?

Clancy: I only wish it did tie in a little more. The terms "right", "left", and "center" are inadequate to express it. But I will say this -- that the analyses undertaken at the Henry George School should be satisfying to liberals who want to see everyone, including the common man, get a fair deal and a substantial measure of economic security without sacrificing freedom.