

Strength and Activity

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Translated by Hans Bjorner.]

IT is a sad sign of weakness, when time after time we have been told in the press that "what we need is a strong and active government." Let it be said at once that this is not the voice of the people, fortunately, but just a journalistic expression of the day. God forbid that we should have "a strong and active government." What the country—our country as well as all other countries—needs is a strong and active people; then the activity and strength of the government will automatically be that of the people, and will be neither too strong nor too weak.

The people will become strong and active when they have the right to live their own life without law-made monopolies for individuals or groups, together with equal right for all to elect the government—that is, home rule. And they must also have the right to make mistakes. A self-ruling people, whose industries are not weakened by monopoly and restrictions will always be a strong and active people, and its government the respected servant of the state.

The director of the government of Greenland, K. Oldendow, recently made a speech about Greenland. The Greenlanders, he said, were a strong and active people, like all other esquimaux. Ordinarily, when the white man came into contact with the esquimaux, this hardy tribe deteriorated. But not those in Greenland. The Danish Government took the fate of the Greenlanders in its hand. The Greenlanders were permitted to keep the earnings of their own work; and they were not only permitted, but helped to keep their own language—also when it was in print. The Greenlanders were well situated economically; and because there is in Greenland no land monopoly there is no unemployment. They were well taken care of. The Danish-Greeland government acted as a mild, enlightened, absolute power. And yet—the Greenlanders did not thrive. It seemed that their development had come to a standstill. They became stunted under the Danish, humane dictatorship.

Then, half a century ago, the Danish-Greenland colony-managers gathered to discuss what could be done to help the Greenlanders. A clever man said: "What the Greenlanders need is to have some responsibility or co-responsibility in the ruling of their own affairs." This was done—and behold! Almost instantly the advantages of self-responsibility could be seen. The Greenlanders again came to life and became the happy, strong and active people they had been before.

It is consequently not enough for a people—as Henry George says—to be well governed. The people themselves must govern their own fate, good or bad. Only that gives strength and activity.