

Have Americans Not Heard of Henry George?

By PHILIPP KNAB, Austria

IN the July edition of the *Reader's Digest* there is a piteous story entitled "Our Great Big Highway Bungle". What is it about?

Well, in 1956 a 40,000 mile super-highway network scheme was launched, which was "to sweep majestically from coast to coast, as the greatest engineering project of all times, a splendid monument to a free people's wisdom, daring, foresight and skill". It was to cost 27 billion dollars.

Today it is reported that this dream has become a nightmare of recklessness, extravagance, special privilege, bureaucratic stupidity and, sometimes, outright thievery. Unexpected additional costs have increased the estimate to nearly 40 billion dollars, officially; to more than 50 billion, privately.

What has gone wrong? Why? asks Karl Detzer, the author of the article, and he proceeds to enumerate the chief causes and the most glaring examples of what seems to be a chain reaction of gigantic fraud and graft. Local need—and local greed—at the expense of the general good, encouraged by irresponsibility and inefficiency, waste, reckless planning, manoeuvred by gangs of boosters into the heart of cities to be cut in half in spite of the majority of the inhabitants protesting, but bringing huge indemnities to some land owners; mismanagement, bribery and so forth, a monotonous record of administrative and moral deficiency. Several times Detzer refers to land speculation, to costly purchases with more dollars going for land than for construction, to officials securing the strategic spots along the right of way, to splendid real estate deals; but he fails to see that here he touches the very root of the evil.

For a government to announce that it is going to construct a project of such magnitude—without owning the necessary land and without having land-value taxation as a means of redress—is as foolish and irresponsible as the medieval kings' throwing golden coins among the cheering crowd, making it fight and scramble for some of the money the whole people had to toil for in the way of taxes. Whereas it should be the duty and wisdom of governments to strengthen the instincts of solidarity and unselfish service for the community, such a procedure is apt to unleash all the passions of reckless egotism.

The question may be asked: Have the Americans in charge never heard of a man called Henry George? One of their—and humanity's—greatest thinkers and moralists? What are they being taught at their numerous universities and high schools of business, economy and sociology? Even a mere abstract of Henry George's teachings must

have given them an idea of what was to be expected from advertising such a programme in a country where land monopoly still reigns supreme.

Will not the Communists sneer at this sad tale of unchecked speculation and use it as a sample of capitalistic inferiority? There will be the smart of truth in such scorn. Surely there are even far worse things hushed up by the close censorship of the Bolshevik slave state, but that is no excuse for a system which claims to have found the key to the problem of human symbiosis.

The American taxpayer whose indignant reaction is now expected will be at a loss where to direct it, for members of both big parties are mixed up in the case. But what he should learn from it is that sound public investment always produces a multiple of its volume in rising land values and that the federal and state governments, supposing they had a share therein by a moderate tax on these values could always cover the expenditure of such investments, without squeezing his pocket, either by gradual redemption or by using them as a security for a loan. As it is the cost is met out of the tyre and gasoline tax, i.e. at the expense of the many whereas the soaring land form a bonanza for the privileged few.

All we can say and hope for is that Americans read their HENRY GEORGE.

Ezra Cohen (1891-1960)

IT is hard to believe that we can no longer call upon Ezra Cohen for counsel or to speak at a Henry George function; that we can no longer see his warm and friendly smile and benefit from his sympathetic approach in reconciling differences of opinion.

Ezra Cohen was born in Manhattan's lower East Side, in the same building where "Al" Smith had lived. This was the time when Henry George had become world famous and friends were urging that he go into politics as the best way of publicising his objectives. The story of his two mayoralty campaigns, the ganging-up against him of the machine politicians of both parties, the probable miscounting of ballots, the second campaign against the advice of his doctor, his death just before election and the enormous outpouring of love and affection at his funeral, is well-known to Georgeists who have read the literature describing those days.

Ezra was too young to appreciate these events, though his father then and for the rest of his life, was a staunch disciple of George. It was a soapbox speaker, some twenty years later, at 59th Street and Broadway, the "Hyde Park" of New York, who supplied the revelatory spark that lit the torch that Ezra carried thereafter.

As a young man, Ezra followed Greeley's advice and went west to Salt Lake City. There he worked in a large retail women's apparel shop for three years, by which time he had become its manager. People whom he met then, in business, social and charitable activities, kept up their friendship with him to the end of his life.

He had to return east, however, to help his father organise a new dress manufacturing concern. For the next thirty years, Ezra was active in this business. Though he was busy in trade associations, in religious and charitable circles, there was no activity that gave greater pleasure and satisfaction than his work in the George movement. He was a trustee of the Henry George School of Social Science, and of the Schalkenbach Foundation; and last summer was elected a vice-president of the International Union for Land Value Taxation and Free Trade.

A few years ago, following the death of two younger brothers who had been associated with him in the manufacturing business, he liquidated the concern and became a travel agent because he had travelled much and was interested in all lands and peoples. He and his wife, his constant and devoted companion, made many trips to all parts of the world, firing his imagination and fortifying his Georgeist convictions.

People will remember Ezra Cohen, the man, as the delightful host carving a roast with a finesse of an international chef, or the gardener in his Connecticut summer place for whom nature bloomed, or the after-dinner speaker who recounted with such imagery and charm his adventures abroad, or the serious lecturer who painted such a vivid picture of the world that could be. Ezra Cohen lived in far greater measure by reason of this dedication to that which he deemed just and right and befitting the dignity and the uniqueness of the individual.

—M. S. LURIO, Boston.

Correspondence

EDUCATION IN A FREE SOCIETY

To the Editor of Land & Liberty.

Sir,—In his "Education in a Free Society" (L & L July, 1960), A. J. Carter calls it a "fundamental injustice" of state schools (called "public schools" in the U.S.A.) that "those without children must subsidise those with children."

But does such subsidy really occur? Mr. Carter himself indicates that "Children... are neither part of their parents nor the property of their parents but human beings in their own right, and therefore the State has a justifiable interest in them."

Can a childless couple properly complain, then, against the state providing free schooling to the ten children of a neighbouring couple? I think not. The childless couple, *when they were children*, had the same opportunity to attend the free schools as is now enjoyed by their ten young fellow citizens nearby. Each human being receives equal treatment from the state. Each, as a child, has equal opportunity to attend the state schools. The notion that state schools constitute a subsidy of large families by small ones arises from the idea that children are the property of their parents and have no rights of their own.

It is a curious fact that here in the United States the staunchest advocates of "private" schools over public schools still seek and accept land tax exemptions and other forms of subsidy. It will be a sorry trade if our public schools should be so successfully abused as to be replaced by private ones over which citizens lose control but for which they continue to pay tax support.

It goes without saying that state schools should be financed by taxes on the value of land. To a substantial extent they still are so financed in the United States.

Yours faithfully,
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Henry George School of Social Science,
San Francisco 3, Calif.

POTATO QUOTA

To the Editor of Land & Liberty.

Sir,—The Potato Marketing Board has determined that 1961 shall be a quota year and that each Registered Producer's acreage shall be equivalent to 90 per cent of his basic acreage. As a Member of the Board I opposed the imposition of a quota. I considered it would be completely unpracticable as far too many unpredictable factors are involved.

Weather conditions during the growing season have a greater effect on the home crop—quotas included. The variation in average yield between good and bad years may be as much as two tons per acre, a difference of about 1½ million tons of potatoes. How can the Board, or anyone else, tell whether there will be a shortage or a glut next year? No one knows how many tons of potatoes will be imported during 1961; the total home demand is also unknown.

To prove the truth of these arguments one has only to look at the experience of 1959. The operation of acreage quotas failed completely and pathetically to regulate the British crop. Growers were forced to pay the Board about £200,000 in excess acreage levies; few, if any, would claim they have received any real benefit from this additional expense.

Although centralised planning of quotas may appear reasonable on paper, it interferes with rotational cropping and harms agriculture by tending to prevent farmers using their own land to the best advantage, as in the case of those occupiers of clean land, suitable for potato growing, who have inadequate quotas or none at all.

Yours faithfully,
JACK MERRICKS

Winchelsea, Sussex.

Curly Cucumbers A Crime — OFFICIAL. The state monopoly Tomato & Cucumber Board last month prohibited the sale of curved cucumbers from August 19-31. Penalty for infringing this latest anti-customer measure: £100 fine (maximum) plus half the proceeds of any contravening sale. **The New Daily** gave national publicity to this impertinence. The Board has over-reached itself this time and signed its death warrant.

LAND & LIBERTY