

all of them irritating and immoral because they lay hands on what is morally our own—can be taken off, why, in the name of all that is logical, sane, and reasonable, has it not been adopted long ago?

"Perhaps that question is partially answered in my remarks on moral blindness and the opposition of the possessors of title-deeds, and perhaps the complete answer can be found in the fact that the average being is inherently a slave to habit and a worshipper of tradition. This saves him thinking, a thing he is very reluctant to do. He finds it so much easier to be pushed around than to do a little healthy pushing himself, and if he does become stubbornly and grandly dogmatic it is on ideas he has picked up secondhand from his political party or the newspaper he reads. . . .

"I have read everything you have sent—*Dictator-Democrat* is excellent—hence my conversion. Now I would like to read Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*.

"Many thanks for all you have done—especially for that new window you have opened on the affairs of the every-day

world. I have never before said anything about taxation that was not rude and ill-mannered!"

Another Window Ajar?

Mr. O. D. Robinson, M.I.E.E., wrote from Bournemouth:

"I have read the article by Judge Lucas with considerable interest. I have for a long time regarded income tax and property tax as unjust and thoroughly bad for the individual and the community; as is everything that puts the brake on effort. Although Government and Municipal expenditure at the present rate needs reducing drastically, some expenditure is of course inevitable and I have been rather in favour of taxes on expenditure as being fairer. But I do certainly see very clearly the point of taxing that which a person acquires without any effort on his part and land values equally certainly come into this category."

The Season for Planting—by Walt Rybeck*

When you see a truth clear as clear, when it shines out as a beacon that could save multitudes who are lost on an uncharted course, you want to see men fired by this truth, laying low every obstacle that prevents it from lighting the way of their groping fellowmen . . .

Apparently acceptance of a dynamic economic fact and its underlying philosophy is not going to come like a bolt of lightning. Preceding it must be a period of vigorous debate which, to put it mildly, certainly is not raging to-day. The opposing winds are many. Let me mention a few.

One is RESPECT FOR COMPLEXITY. This seems to go along with an awe of the scientific age. Nobody understands anything: the light switch, how a car runs, where nylon grows, how TV works, why the pasteurised homogenised and fortified milk arrives daily at the door in a paper carton.

Of course, it is a delusion that everything must be complex. The most dramatic and presumably the most complicated scientific fact of the century—the harnessing of the atom—can be boiled down to the simple relationship of $E=mc^2$. Yet the worship, and even love, of complexity—as if an excuse not even to try to understand—persists. Is it any mystery that, at a time when people have given up trying to understand health, engineering, education, religion and psychiatry that such a simple idea in economics as the single tax fails to win respect?

Another opposing wind is that of CENTRALISATION. Not only must things in this age be complex and unfathomable. They also must be big. Central government by some mystic means is supposed to accomplish what local governments have failed to do. Big government, presumably, can do anything. When it fails, individual weakness and ineptness are blamed, but faith in big government is not shaken. Such ground is much riper for authoritarianism—*please beware*—than for the seeds of freedom we would like to plant.

A third harsh wind is SUBMERGENCE OF THE INDIVIDUAL. Every day there is evidence that modern man consigns his

morals to the amoral corporation, his struggle for security to the insecure state and his soul to soulless membership in a church congregation. This age has lost faith in man. Does this not help to explain why there is so much concern about man's needs and so much less about his rights and his opportunities to express them?

A chill wind is the ACCENT ON EXPEDIENCY. In personal affairs, anything you can get away with is acceptable. In government, any approach that will please a few dissident voters is acceptable, regardless of the possibility that the so-called solution may create worse problems than those it is designed to cure.

In taxation, expediency asks only that money can be raised. It closes its eyes to questions of fairness, incentives to fraud or long range effects.

Another wind, or perhaps a whirlwind, is a mixture of HOPELESSNESS and OVER-OPTIMISM. There is a schizophrenic wavering between a sense of doom and a delirious joy that progress and prosperity are here to stay. Scientific thought finds a poor resting place in either. In the one mood there seems to be a distinct impression that *absolutely nothing* can be solved. In the other there is the distinct impression that absolutely nothing needs solving.

Does this seem to be the season for us—I speak of us as a nation—to refine our sense of justice, to trace cause and effect, or to reduce complexities to their fundamental elements with accuracy and precision?

A Valuable Yardstick for Editors

Let's escape from this inclement weather, for the moment, and take refuge in the proverbial ivory tower of the editorial writer.

I do not accept the proposition that the editorial writer is or should be apart from the world. But if you insist on a tower, I will insist on one with picture windows on all sides for a good perspective. For the editorial writer must watch the stream of events, the people, the world of to-day—and make value judgments about what is going on. You know, of course, that the reporter presents the factual side of the news and the editorial writer offers opinion.

* Extracts from the report in the "Henry George News," New York, of an address delivered at the 12th annual Conference of the Henry George School held at Bryn Mawr, Philadelphia, Pa. in July. Mr. Rybeck is an editorial writer for the "Dayton Daily News," Ohio, and a subscriber to LAND & LIBERTY.

How does an editorial writer form his judgments, deciding to-morrow about things that he doesn't know are going to happen until they do? Each day is a surprise. What should he be against to-day?

Bewilderment and confusion must reign unless members of the staff have measuring sticks of some sort. To call something good or less than good requires, somewhere in the recesses of the cranium, an image of the good society and the good life.

The worthiness of a public statement or action then becomes a measurement of the speed with which, in the writer's opinion, it carries to-day's world closer to (or farther from) that utopian image.

It is my conviction that Henry George's clarification of the concept of justice and its application is one of the most useful and valuable measuring devices an editorial writer can possess . . .

Let me mention some of the major problems in my city of Dayton, Ohio, and farther afield which are more readily analysed, thanks to Henry George. Growth is probably the dominant factor . . .

The great new wealth and prosperity, the increase of slums, the dislocated families, the unprecedented welfare loads and the boom in housing are a repetition of the familiar theme of progress mated with poverty.

More efficient government administration, citizens' groups to prevent property values from slipping, zoning and master planning are assembled to stem the tide momentarily. The next step demanded by civic pride and business considerations both is a community face-lifting such as many large American cities are experiencing. This requires higher taxes, and the popular methods of taxation promise to sabotage every good intention, creating new problems faster than old ones can be solved. Tax resistance develops. Little *Poujadist* groups with anarchistic tendencies emerge. It almost takes a Georgeist to understand what is "eating them," turning them into such anti-social forces.

Great fortunes still are being made. To those who wish to learn the method, the little news items revealing the amount of real estate holdings when wills are probated give significant clues.

Community chests have grown fabulously. Their organisation is superb. Wondrous prestige attaches to working with them. No one can deny that they are a living demonstration that Americans have their hearts in the right place, that they are not content to sit by idly in the face of want, misery, delinquency and sordidness. Collections are getting more refined all the time. They amount to a sort of tax. Fairly definite quotas are set. Few people escape. I have no idea as to who bears the biggest burden among individuals. Corporations carry the giant share from profits that otherwise would be taxed for government.

Does it occur to you sometimes—aside from all the worth while features of community chests—that these organisations are well on their way to becoming the modern welfare state? Because they are called private, the onus of socialism is removed and the strongest opponents of socialism and the welfare state are not only the supporters but the directors. They extend their range of activities continuously, pouncing on new problems gleefully if funds can be squeezed out for them. I do not recall that any problem that has come under chest jurisdiction—except perhaps a problem of physical disease—ever has been solved or any agency disbanded with its mission accomplished.

Local governments are becoming impoverished. A double ransom is paid to acquire land for highways, schools, sewers and other public works, once in giving the landowner what

the community created and again in taxing the community to pay him for it. Miserable shacks and neglected buildings stand in the way of community betterment. In other words, ever-present land speculation is taking its toll.

Any of you could offer a solution: tax land values, untax improvements on the land, the price of land will drop, slums will be profitable no longer, and local governments can expand naturally with their growth.

Do not let the fact that this seems so simple and obvious fool you. I am still a novice in this study and let me remind you: simplest things require deep understanding, for they are highly refined. The simple Golden Rule must be at least a few thousand years old—but who fully comprehends it and puts it into action? And the winds are wrong.

Ineffectual Opponents of Tyranny

Turning to the national or international theme, communism certainly is the number one problem of the times. How ineffectual are its opponents.

Fear-mongers would suppress the freedom communism denies.

Thought-controllers would supplant one dogma for another.

Rugged individualists shut their eyes to social problems and the misery in their midst. They say the way to halt communism is to stop "coddling" the very people who, if left to suffer, would be the easiest prey of the Communists.

Pious folk say the answer to communism is prayer. But one suspects they are asking pretty much the same thing in their prayers to God as the Communists are wishing for in their expectations from the state.

Social planners would have us as regimented as the Communists.

It is often said that people tend to imitate their enemies. Are the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. growing more alike? Have we put our finger on the essential differences? Does it not grate a little to hear the term "Free World" used so glibly, not merely as a comparative statement, but as if we enjoyed complete freedom?

Free trade, for instance, is a part of freedom, but while many are in favour of "freer trade," few would trust it all the way. National interest is believed to be something quite different from and opposed to the interest of the individuals in the nation. Mercantilism, controlled trade, favours traded for favours, are the rage. Trade wars continue to pave the way to shooting wars.

The international struggle for resources, and the confusion over who has rights to America's resources, baffle the public. Poor people live in rich lands. People who produce surpluses become impoverished. Hunger and rotting food occur simultaneously. Such dilemmas are shocking enough to expect that a few people would get curious about a new dimension of freedom that seems to us to offer a way out.

A multitude of things are clarified by a study of Henry George. But what good, you have a right to ask, is it to see a solution, even if only dimly, and not be able to offer it?

I think a first principle is that you must avoid fooling yourself. A Thoreau or Ghandi or George show that with superb moral and spiritual fibre, a man may live consistently with his deepest convictions. If the rest of us tend, in varying extents, to drift with the tides, we are not a total loss unless we forget that we are drifting and lose sight of our ideals. Plenty of us collect unearned increment in land. The important thing is that you know it really isn't yours.

I do not bemoan the fact that weeks and months pass without an opportunity to pose the "glorious solution." In editorial writing as in conversation, there is little hope of

convincing anyone of anything. People make up their own minds. It is possible, however, to raise good questions, stir the imagination, provoke thought and inspire others to reach for the stars.

Awakening Public Interest

If the social structure is so confused, why go along with it? Why not abandon it and let it collapse? Isn't what we need a good depression? I reject that attitude as inhumane, dangerous and self-defeating. Suppose we were talking, not about society, but about your beloved Uncle Charlie who is disobeying doctor's orders to take it easy. Would you say, "What Uncle Charlie needs is a good heart attack"? It might prove your point. It might kill him, too.

Don't forget that the particular absence of freedom we bemoan is a single item, far-reaching as its good effects might be if recognised and institutionalised. Would you destroy all other freedoms to obtain it? If chaos came, is it likely that people would turn to reason and philosophy? Far more likely would be the wholesale destruction of every right we now have. Let's preserve what we have, never forgetting at what cost (as we should well be able to imagine) each advance of civilisation was achieved.

An example or two of going along with the stream may be helpful:

Take the city income tax in my town of Dayton. I believe I know a better tax. But there isn't the slightest chance to-day of winning acceptance to it. The income tax is a crutch. I do not suggest removing it—in fact I join the fight to maintain it—until there is a better substitute on hand to take its place.

I shared some of my secret irreverent thoughts before about the possibly unseen directions of the community chest movement. Please do not misunderstand me. For these times and for to-day's needs, considering all the winds opposing a better solution—ours or somebody's—the community chest agencies are a godsend.

Cure the disease or have a better machine ready before you toss out the old. If we point out from time to time that the trend is to treat only symptoms and not cure the disease, we will be making an important contribution.

There is a serious danger, I believe, of joining forces with everybody who seems to share a minute part of your platform. T. Coleman Andrews, former administrator of the income tax* now is its great opponent. Shall we make him our hero?

I'll not embrace him, thank you, until I know what he is for as well as what he is against. This may seem obvious advice. Unfortunately, many liberals lacked such advice during the 'thirties and became pretty bruised by their strange associations. I hate the concept of guilt by association and I'll talk and meet with anybody. But I do think it is tragic to lend your energies and your heart to a cause which may be completely contradictory to your own.

Personally, I would rather work with people who have a common cause and different notions of how to approach the goal, than with people who have a common programme for antagonistic purposes.

To stick only to your one idea when the time is not ripe for it is a lonely path. A little loneliness is fine, for it sets a person off from the crowd so he may contemplate, get to know himself and grow spiritually. Too much is not good, for man is a social creature and, cut off from his brothers, he becomes a nonentity. Worse than loneliness is the possibility that an uncompromiser will become bitter about the rest of mankind. This is entirely out of keeping with the Georgeist philosophy. Is it not ridiculous for people whose

chief desire is to improve the lot of mankind to harbour anything but good will to all men, with compassion for the ignorant as well as for the victims of ignorance?

We do not want to become like the benevolent despot who decided to make his subjects happy if he had to kill them to do so. We must grant people the freedom to be wrong, even though our motives to help them are completely selfless . . . One day the theories and social directions which seem so hopeful to the many will come to dead ends. Guidance will fall to those who have an alternative plan . . .

I write now in the *Dayton Daily News* as if Henry George were looking over my shoulder. One day I hope to be writing as if he were looking over my readers' shoulders.

Compensation and Justice

AN OLD ANALOGY FOR THE NEW READER

Whatever their political views, or their social, economic and cultural circumstances, most people are dominated by an innate sense of justice. So it is that two people, confronted for the first time with the proposal to levy taxation on the value of land, may (and frequently do) react in opposite ways and yet for the same reason. Recognising the nature and origin of land value—that it arises from, and is maintained by, the presence and activities of the community—the first will see the justice of collecting that value for the benefit of the community. But the second, recognising the right of an individual to the value of his labour, will find repugnant any proposal to deprive people of the value of land lawfully acquired with money earned by their labour, or inherited from another who so acquired it. He will insist on full compensation being paid to landowners before any tax is imposed on the value of land. Sincerely held, this attitude is wholly commendable. (It is another matter when advanced by vested interests. They know, none better, that it is present taxation which breaches the rights of property and generates the conflict between individual and community rights, and that the taxation of land values has the opposite effect.)

This call to compensate landowners for loss resulting from a change in the base and incidence of taxation must be answered whenever it is encountered. Thereby the sympathy of those who hold justice dear may be enlisted in support of the reform we advocate. They, above all, are the people we need. With them particularly in mind, we print this passage from a speech by the Rev. Sydney Smith at a Reform Meeting at Taunton a century ago. Opposing the idea of compensation for those whom Reform "injured," he told the story of some highwaymen who were put out of business:

"I remember a friend of mine proposed to draw up for them a petition to the House of Commons for compensation, which ran in this manner:

'We, your loyal highwaymen of Finchley Common and its neighbourhood, having, at great expense, laid in a stock of blunderbusses, pistols, and other instruments for plundering the public, and finding ourselves impeded in the exercise of our calling by the said inclosure of the said Commons of Finchley, humbly petition your Honourable House will be pleased to assign us such compensation as your Honourable House in its wisdom and justice may think fit.'

Gentlemen, I must leave the application to you."

Recommended to the new reader who wishes to pursue this question of "compensation" is the leaflet, "The Rent of Land is Public Property," and the pamphlet, "Justice the Object, Taxation the Means," by Henry George. Copies may be had free on application.

* See LAND & LIBERTY, June-July, 1956, page 53.