

The Eternal Struggle

By ARAM BASHIAN

A garden in which are set the trees of good and evil. A vineyard in which there is the Master's work to do. . . . A trial and a struggle, of which we cannot see the end.—HENRY GEORGE.

BEING a moral crusader, Henry George took his place in the long and historic struggle to free men from their slavery. We have, in these later years, lost sight of the moral reform George taught. It did not find easy acceptance. Since the world has emphasized the materialistic in recent years, we have placed more emphasis on George's fiscal reform. Our materialism has left us, as a movement, weak and impotent. We have not been able to understand the powerful spiritual forces around us because of our materialistic point of view. We have not been able to grow as a liberal influence in society.

In the beginnings of our Western civilization the relationships of men were of master and slave. We had been sleeping in this state for centuries. Then some teachers and thinkers began to question the order and to criticize it. The more they questioned, the more skeptical they became of the "divinity" of the order. Skepticism led to indignation and rebellion. Customs to which men had submitted dumbly were now denounced and overthrown. The aristocracy, who had benefited from the relations and customs of the past, defended their privileges by guile and slaughter. The serfs, as they grew stronger, slaughtered them and overthrew the feudalism of the Middle Ages. They set up new kings to control and direct their relations, since they were still enslaved by their own ignorance and superstition. Once in a while, however, they cut off a king's head to show him who was the real ruler.

They had achieved an enormous degree of freedom compared to their past condition. They learned to print and to use new tools. These new tools increased their production. They began to specialize their skills and to trade goods and ideas over greater and greater areas.

The ideas of our early philosophers were the weapons which brought about these marvelous changes. Men gained a new outlook on life. Their new moral code condemned slavery, an institution as old as man. The pessimism and fatalism of the Middle Ages were replaced by a new optimism and abundance. Men began to think of Utopias.

But we have not yet reached Utopia. In fact, slavery has accompanied our progress. There has been a long and excruciating struggle for freedom in which we have been blinded, not so much by sinister machinations as by our own ignorance, folly and superstition. The progress we

have made has been more material than spiritual and it has not brought us to the Free Society.

Freedom is not material, and it is not inherited. It is a moral and spiritual condition of mind which governs and directs our behavior and relations. The foundations of a Free Society lie in men's beliefs—in their morals. It is only as we change men's morals or beliefs that we can hope to change men's behavior. For this reason, George was concerned first and always with "moral reform."

To insist that men's behavior changes as their material environment changes—that if we could establish our Fiscal Reform the resultant flood of wealth would bring about a Free Society—is to fall into the error of the Marxists. They claim that the evolution of our Western civilization has been due, not to new ideas or morals, but to the fact that we began to use different tools than we did in feudal society. Our ideas, moral or otherwise, they claim, are due to the kind of tools we use. However, we know, as Georgeists, that the relation of master and slave is not due to the kind of tools that are being used or the material environment, but solely to the belief in a moral code that permits slavery. To abolish slavery, then, we must first change men's ethics. The moral reform must come first, and not the fiscal.

This means that we must reorient our interpretation of George to include the maintenance, by war if necessary, of our democratic institutions. Without them we cannot even educate ourselves, let alone teach, and later petition for, our reform. George took these political institutions for granted. He did not dream that any of his followers would ever be so stupid as to renounce these institutions as useless and not worth fighting for.

We must go to greater lengths in our schools, our papers and our speeches, in defining the liberal conception of government. We can only advocate the collection of economic rent by a government instituted under our democratic political institutions. George took it for granted that everyone knew this, and in his time all liberals did, but the last seventy-five years of collectivist influence has made it necessary for us to understand more carefully, and to teach the functions of, a government in a Free Society.

There is an area in which the government best protects the individual from society, and society from the individual. The government here acts as traffic and law officer in the market place. It protects the market from inside decay and outside attack, and also conserves it for coming generations. This means that we must cooperate actively,

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institutions?

and be identified in the public mind with Civil Liberty groups in our cities. From even a selfish viewpoint, we are going to need those liberties ourselves if we ever get big enough to bother the landlords.

We will thus be taking our place in the historic struggle for freedom. The first great step was to gain religious and spiritual freedom. The second was to gain political freedom. The third will be economic freedom. But economic or materialistic freedom cannot come or even exist without the spiritual and political freedoms of the first two steps.

Our chief criticism of our Socialist friends is that they have been too concerned with the materialistic and thus have not been able to understand the forces around them which, we point out, are spiritual. They do not, for instance, place any value on the Individual. He is an abstraction, they say, in our modern society. Yet, many of our Georgeists fall into a similar error when they speak of the "educable elite." This heresy takes its place beside the cynical belief of the Marxists that "the masses are asses." This moral code—a contempt for human beings while claiming a love for humanity—is the inevitable result of a materialistic philosophy.

Using a materialistic criterion, the whole of the past struggle appears stupid, useless and meaningless. With this criterion, we can point to any past group of serfs fighting for some minor religious or political freedom and show the futility and waste of it. Yet, with a spiritual criterion, we can see that enormous gains were being made. The serf was beginning to rid his mind of ignorance and superstition and to think of himself as a being of dignity—not a beast of burden. Some began to speak of Justice and Equality and Freedom.

So, from a materialistic standpoint, our Labor Movement seems useless and in vain. Incidents here and there can be cited by a materialist to "prove" this. That some union leaders are racketeers and ambitious cannot be denied, but it should be pointed out that some leaders of all organizations are also, in equal proportion, racketeers and ambitious. And it should be remembered that the unorganized workingman, pitted against the power of the landlords, is little better than a serf. It was the trade unions that lifted from us the property qualifications on our franchise. They gave us free public education. The only gains labor ever made were by organized effort, and the only gains labor can ever make will be by organization. That they are not perfect is inherent in any human undertaking. That they have been unduly influenced by the collectivists is due to our default. The unions have been the only large group ever interested in our reform. For this reason, Georgeists must fight to prevent any weakening of the labor movement.

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We must cooperate actively and be identified actually in

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the public mind with the labor movement, as Georgeists are in England. While the dangers of unionism are as well known to me as to you, I don't think that "America's Sixty Landlords" will ever be separated from their special privileges except by the strength of some "sixty unions." The greatest condemnation of our unions comes from those who will be the loudest in denunciation of our reform once we get started.

The study of contemporary European history shows that a strong labor movement is the greatest bulwark of political democracy and is the backbone of gradual reform. Thus it was necessary for both the fascists and communists to destroy the trade unions to gain their ends. The wise political leaders of this country and England have recognized this principle long since, and the labor movement in both these countries is strong and forward looking. Of course, I will admit that insofar as achieving our fiscal reform is concerned, the unions might even be considered to be holding us back. But insofar as these men are beginning to change morally and to be critical of their status and to denounce their servitude, they are beginning to be free men. For instance, the bigotry and discrimination between the white and colored people, particularly in the South, is being broken down only as these men learn to associate together in their unions. AFL anti-negro

"Association is the first essential in progress," wrote George. Association is something which our Georgeist movement very definitely lacks. We have been, too often, guilty of speaking down to our contemporaries from a tower. We could not see that many other people had the same moral code we professed, because we were so concerned with our fiscal reform. Get the cause of my

Once we begin to concentrate on our moral reform we will begin to find ourselves associating with many people who have been, until now, strangers to us. Some of these are the five million or more people who are the moral power or influence behind the New Deal.

Many of these people, of eminent goodwill, have been, it is true, flirting with collectivism. But they are, today, in a quandary. "We are," says Reinhold Niebuhr, "Marxists in various stages of decay." The Lewis Coreys and Max Lerner are talking of "socialistic competition" and "democratic socialism." Forced to make their beliefs specific, where can these people find haven except in the Free Society of George? They will have to give up their collectivist ideas and settle for the collection of Economic Rent in a Free Market Economy. This means that we must stop our antagonistic criticisms of these people. Whatever criticisms we do make must be as friend to friend and must be made to gain converts and not to rouse animosity and suspicion—let alone losing many who go through our schools.

Again we must cooperate actively and be identified actually in the public mind with the Federal Union movement. Our

Look what is happening

Georgeist reform is not going to come down out of Heaven full grown and settle over the entire earth. Free Trade can only grow gradually. It can only grow as men begin to trust one another and to adopt the same moral and political code.

In a union with England there is the obvious danger of "Anglo-American imperialism," so called. But as long as this imperialism professes our moral and political code, we will be limited only by our own blundering efforts to master and use these democratic tools.

The November, 1941, issue of *Modern Industry* contained a debate, "Would a Federal Union of Democracies Benefit Free Enterprise?" This magazine is circulated among managers and foremen in industry. The result of a postcard poll of these people on the question was 60 per cent Yes and 40 per cent No. As far as understanding the significance of and approving a Federal Union of the democracies, these non-Georgeists are far ahead of our "fundamental Georgeists," many of whom are anglophobes.

A union between the United States and the British Commonwealth is the one actual step forward that can come of this war. This is the one reform that can rouse any considerable majority support and enthusiasm. These are the only tariff walls which can be broken down without blind and strong opposition. It is a tendency towards Free Trade which can only take place between peoples governed by the same moral and political code. Such a union would be powerful enough to eliminate any further possibility of nationalistic wars which have confused our social thinking. If we do not secure for ourselves a fairly high degree of safety from foreign attack, we must remain that much longer in a protection economy. The only road to a Free Society is under our form of government, and the greater the extension of our common laws throughout the world, the better are our chances to bring about our reform. A union with the British Commonwealth is a start in this direction.

To our "fundamental" Georgeists all this may be "politics." To me it is the practice of a faith. Politics is no more than the application of our beliefs to our common affairs. It is the example which George himself set for us. And it is a belief consistent with, and part of, our long liberal struggle for justice. It is a militant belief which uses all the tools available.

Since Pearl Harbor, it may well be that we are at the beginning of the end—that we are living at the climax of our materialistic Georgeism, its interpretations already dust and ashes in men's mouths, and its appalling consequences no longer matters of academic debate but of bitter and shocking experience.

Our schools, of course, must stick to education. But they must turn out graduates who will be ready to attach themselves to liberal movements, and be a leaven among them. For education doesn't merely present information. Its object is to free the human mind of past ignorance. It directs and persuades. It arouses hopes and emotions.

Only educators who have retreated to an ivory tower can be indifferent to the oppression around us. They may in their "wisdom" bargain with it, but we who are the followers and teachers of the liberal Henry George will find ourselves fighting against the landlords and monopolists whenever and wherever we can.

Education which is opposed to the landlords and the monopolists must rouse the determination to resist this oppression, to check it, to cut it down, and to crush it. Education upset feudalism. It will bring us Freedom.

An age of catastrophe can be used as the beginning of a better order. Never in the history of our Western civilization have we had such an opportunity to finally consolidate all our past gains and set forth to gain the greatest Freedom. To achieve this desirable end, we must reorient our movement and place it at the leadership of the world liberal movement.

This means, as I have been saying, that we must first place most of our emphasis on George's moral reform, not the fiscal or material. Second, we must evaluate events around us with this moral criterion and not the materialism of our fiscal reform. Third, we must, with more charity and sympathy, work closer to other people and groups of goodwill. The responsibility for taking these steps rests upon us.

[Mr. Bashian is a trustee of the Henry George Institute of New England, with headquarters in Boston, operating under charter from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We believe that the Boston school might well be taken as a model of good sense and tolerance in disseminating the principles of Henry George.—Ed.]

It Happened in Alabama

THE following news item appeared in *The Fairhope Courier*: "MOBILE, ALA.—Flabbergasted was the word for the county board of roads and revenues when it received this letter from Joseph J. Jives: 'My land was so poor it wouldn't even grow cactus, but when you put a road through it, those 10 acres became the richest plot in the whole county, thanks to a combination grocery store and jook joint I have erected. . . . Enclosed you will find a check for \$142.22, which you will please have credited to the county's road and bridge fund. This sum represents one per cent. of the unearned increment and my appreciation for the service the county has done me.'"

Well might the county board be flabbergasted at the concrete acknowledgment of this unusual landowner. But they might do better to be impressed by their own lack of discernment. "If it were a dog it would bite them." No doubt many other landowners are less ostensibly and more inwardly blessing the government for making their land valuable through public services, with nary a thought of laying claim to any of the increased value so created. Not-so-discerning county boards should ponder the lesson this isolated case of gratitude offers: Why not charge for public services out of the unearned land-value increment the public services create?

Good - but apply this to republicans as well.