

The Problem Of Persuasion

By KEITH BAYNES

Keith Baynes was born in 1931, and after a grammar school education and some years in the R.A.F. became a chartered accountant. He is a member of the Executive of the United Committee and has been a tutor of the Henry George School since 1952. He has been a member of the Liberal Party since 1951 and was a local government candidate in 1959. At the last General Election he acted as agent for fellow-Georgeist David Mills.

His special interests are photography, cine-photography, car-rallying, cricket, tennis, astronomy, yachting and aviation.

If you were asked to visualise a typical chartered accountant, I'm sure you would think of a neat, tidy, orderly person, probably wearing glasses, and possessing a neat, tidy, orderly mind. A person, you would imagine, with whom everything was carefully planned and plotted well in advance, and to whom nothing "just happened." In the main, you would probably be right. There are however exceptions. I am one of them. Almost every important event in my life has either "just happened" or has been the result of some sudden unreasoning impulse. Naturally, I don't let my clients know this, but I don't mind telling you.

I was lucky at school, most subjects interested me, and I managed to achieve four distinctions and five credits in what was then the School Certificate examinations. I suppose I was all set for a crack at University when during the summer holidays between the first and second years in the sixth form, I suddenly decided that I didn't want to go back to school, but would prefer to fly in the Royal Air Force. My snap decision shocked several people — including on reflection, myself.

And so, soon after my eighteenth birthday, I was entrusted with several thousand pounds worth of aeroplane to fling round the sky and bounce on the runway. Luckily I never broke one, and flying was something I really enjoyed. Life in the Royal Air Force was however a very different story. Maybe it was the rules, regulations, petty disciplines and restrictions that caused the first stirrings of my libertarianism. At the time, I tended to kick against the discipline as unnecessary, but looking



back I can see that it was needed — and always will be — in the sort of society which is typified by the fighting services. The important thing to my mind is to reject

utterly any suggestion that the organisation and control in the armed services should form a pattern for the governing of a nation, for the regimentation of its inhabitants into an unthinking, unquestioning mass.

All this of course is more recent thought. At the time it was a sense of frustration and an uncertainty about the future combined with the total lack of any way of being able to mould it for myself, that caused me to ask for my release. After three months of dish-washing and peeling potatoes, I got it.

Now what was I to do? Naturally, I didn't plan and plot my next move for the very good reason that I had not the slightest idea of what it should be. It was left to chance. I happened to meet two sisters a couple of years earlier while watching the Australians thrash Essex at cricket. Their father was a chartered accountant (not that I really knew just what that involved); their elder brother was also training to become one, and there was a vacancy in the firm where he was articled. I applied, and before you could say Henry George, there I was trying to understand our tax system!

My introduction to the ideas of Henry George occurred one warm evening, late in September 1951. The General Election campaign was on, though I was scarcely aware of anything out of the ordinary. That was, until I heard a certain voice. It was high pitched and eager, and it sliced through the rumble of passing traffic like a knife. Its source was a chubby-faced bespectacled man mounted on a somewhat unstable rostrum, and surrounded by a small group of people. I have no idea now what the voice was saying, but I'm willing to gamble pretty long odds that land value taxation and free trade were involved, because the owner of the voice, the face, and I trust the spectacles, was Harry Pollard, one of the finest libertarians it has been my pleasure to know, who was then fighting Ilford North for the Liberals. Harry

had a priceless gift of being able to use simple examples to put over George's ideas, and I have yet to meet anyone to equal him at this, particularly when dealing with a casual, open-air audience. I haven't seen Harry Pollard* for a long time — and if he should happen to read this, will he please note that his hypothetical YO-YO has been well preserved, and passed on to every student who has ever attended a course run by me, as a simple example to illustrate economic arguments.

But I am jumping ahead, for it was not Harry Pollard who was directly responsible for my basic education in the workings of a truly free economy although, after the inevitable lost deposit at the election, Harry suggested that we in the Young Liberals could well benefit from a course run by some people called Georgeians or Georgeists or something. Harry's recommendation was good enough for us, especially when backed up by the enthusiasm of Long John (not the playwright) Osborne, now also emigrated to Canada. We were assured that we would find it interesting and enjoyable. It was.

Our tutor was Ron Blundell, brother of the gentleman whom I can almost feel wielding his censorial blue pencil over my story. I owe a great deal to Ron Blundell, for it was his quiet yet effective explanations and arguments that started my thoughts along constructive libertarian lines. It is no slur on his methods to admit that when the course was ended, I hadn't really grasped the supreme importance of George's simple idea. And it is interesting to speculate just how soon the full meaning would have come to me had it not been for an unexpected and unsought opportunity which came my way.

One of our class had obviously grasped the idea more quickly than I, and had made arrangements to attend the international conference at Odense in Denmark. However he had to cry off, and he asked me whether I would be interested in taking his place. I decided to go. There I listened and talked to Dr. Viggo Starcke, Ashley Mitchell, Vic Blundell, Peter Stubbings and the late Arthur Madsen. Quite suddenly, I understood. I know it was sudden, and yet I don't know when it happened — for it somehow seemed that I had always understood. Ever since that time I have wrestled with what I consider to be the greatest of our problems — the problem of how to put over most effectively our ideas to others.

It is ten years since that conference, and I am still searching, still trying to forge a satisfactory link between the realisation of the obvious truth of man's absolute dependence on land, and the reality of putting this over to men and women who would quite rightly ignore the man who stands up and blames our troubles on "lack of access" to land.

It is easy to show people the faults in our rating system, and it is easy to demonstrate the superiority of site-

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value rating. It is not difficult to point out the iniquities of our tax system and to suggest that most of it could, with advantage, be replaced by a tax on the unimproved value of land. But none of these things will ever convince people of the desperate injustice of men "owning" the natural resources on which and from which their fellow men must live, and of the power of men being able to prevent others from using the very surface of our Earth on which we all were born.

Merely knowing better ways to gather rates and taxes will never spur men to the Herculean task of countering the conscious and unconscious forces working against us. Only men possessing a burning passion for a better society can be expected to strain to achieve it.

We need such men and women, not in the present ones and twos, but in hundreds and thousands. The problem of conveying George's philosophy of freedom to others is the problem that has nagged me ever since I came to understand it.

Henry George in *Progress and Poverty* suggested that the association of poverty (cloaked now by the Welfare State) with material progress was the riddle that "the Sphinx of Fate puts to our civilisation." George solved the problem by showing how land has the power to absorb increases in wealth, and how those who are landless must pay ever-increasing amounts for the right to use the natural resources of our globe.

Our problem today is no less real, our riddle no less challenging. We must find a dynamic way of putting over George's ideas, for if we fail, he and we shall have laboured in vain. George himself foresaw the difficulties. Towards the end of *Progress and Poverty* he wrote: "But the bitterest thought — and it sometimes comes to the best and bravest — is that of the hopelessness of the effort, the futility of the sacrifice. To how few of those who sow the seed is it given to see it grow, or even with certainty to know that it will grow."

We are in the unhappy position of a doctor who knows why his patient is ill and perhaps dying, and even knows how to cure the illness, yet lacks the ability to convince superstitious, prejudiced or ignorant relatives of the need for treatment.

Somehow or other we must find a way. We can see a vision of a better society in which true freedom, not coercion and control, is the foundation, a society in which inequalities of personal wealth do not distort and one in which all economic privilege is abolished. We can see this happy society. Our task is to give this vision to the rest of mankind.

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