

THE GEORGIST JOURNAL

Number 7

Spring 1975

COMMENT

I never cease to be amazed at the timeliness of Progress and Poverty and how it seems to adapt itself to current situations. At a class recently started, based on this book, we read from the Introductory, "The Problem." George discusses "widely varying attempts to account for the prevailing depression" which "show that the concurrence which should exist between those who avow the same general theories breaks up upon practical questions into an anarchy of opinion."

I had never really noticed this bit before, much as I have read the book. It takes on special significance as economists, consultants, advisers are called to Washington and other capitals to decide what must be done about the present bad state of economic affairs. And it is pretty much as George described: professors and practicing economists, who claim to have imbibed accepted economic theory, propound extremely diverging measures.

And this passage, also from "The Problem," has great relevance today: "Upon high economic authority we have been told that the prevailing depression is due to overconsumption; upon equally high authority, that it is due to overproduction; while the wastes of war, the extension of railroads, the attempts of workmen to keep up wages, the demonetization of silver, the issues of paper money, the increase of laborsaving machinery, the opening of shorter avenues to trade, etc., are separately pointed out as the cause, by writers of reputation." Change a few details for the sake of up-dating, and you have the situation today.

George goes on: "And while professors thus disagree, the ideas that there is a necessary conflict between capital and labor, that machinery is an evil, that competition must be restrained and interest abolished, that wealth may be created by the issue of money, that it is the duty of government to furnish capital or to furnish work, are rapidly making way among the great body of the people, who keenly feel a hurt and are sharply conscious of a wrong."

The main change in the above statement today is that it is not just the masses who are saying these things, but many professors too.

Economics is in disarray today. For a period - from the postwar period to the present slump - it appeared that economists had things figured out, chiefly with the aid of Keynesianism. But now their measures do not work and their predictions do not turn out. The New Economics had discarded classical economics as a result of the Great Depression; now its turn seems to have come to be discarded.

Is this an opportunity for a reconsideration of the Georgist teachings? Certainly it would not do any harm and might do some good to take this occasion to once again bring to the attention of economists the neglected doctrines of Henry George.

R.C.

The Georgist Journal, Rm. 462-A, 55 W. 42nd St., New York, N.Y. 10036, USA.
Robert Clancy, Editor. Readers are invited to submit suitable articles, letters, etc. for publication.