

# Five and Twenty

## School Years

by Robert Clancy

### IV. Problems and Prospects

More than 75,000 people have completed the basic course in Fundamental Economics as offered by the school, in classes and by correspondence. (This includes Canada as well as the U.S.; also overseas correspondence students, but not counting classes in other countries.) We may double this figure to include those students who have completed some lessons (it could be up to six lessons in class, and nine lessons by correspondence), but who have not graduated.

What does this mean? For one thing, it means that the Henry George School turned the tide and rescued from oblivion the philosophy of Henry George. Not that it would have gone out like a light forever. Somebody would have fanned the flicker into a flame again, but it happened to have been Oscar Geiger. Because of his vision, I think we can feel confident that this won't happen again.

One thing the school's record does not mean is that we have 75,000 or 150,000 ardent recruits ready to whip into action if only somebody did something. This is often implied by friendly critics who give the school more credit than it is entitled to when they say, "Why don't you do something with your graduates? Why don't you give them something to do?"

This is supposing that our compact ten-lesson course has more magical powers than is actually the case. It does make converts, does create enthusiasm and does spread much good will toward the Georgist philosophy.

But it does not automatically turn each and every student into a fiery crusader. Nevertheless, as graduates go forth they are not lost to us. They can't help but carry the influence into their own life and work. We get plenty of evidence of this. It is like a little leaven that leaveneth the whole loaf—and isn't this what we want, this penetration into society at large—undirected and therefore more varied and effective than we could possibly plan?



Then, too, Georgists, as has oft been noted, are individualists. Outside of the school organization itself, they have never been

able to weld into a cohesive actionist group. (I am just speaking of the U.S.) Even within the school, there have been numerous alumni organizations, or attempts, which sooner or later have come to nothing. Among the now extinct groups, in or out of the school, that have issued the "clarion call" to graduates, were the Student Alumni Council, the Henry George Fellowship, the League for Freedom, the American Alliance to Advance Freedom, the Society of Free Men, Wealth, Inc., the Society for the Advancement of the George Economy, and I could name more.

I participated in every one of the above (except the Society of Free Men, which came about when I was in the army) and I am still puzzled.

In most cases there was capable leadership and a right good will on the part of the members. There was, of course, the usual reasons why any voluntary organization fails—the rarity of responsibility, the difficulty of getting sustained help, the opportunists who lead it astray. But why didn't the law of averages yield at least one success in our case? Here is my diagnosis: There is nothing in a person's introduction to the Henry George philosophy, via the school, to prepare him for the discipline of organization. His school experience and his textbook *Progress and Poverty*, conspire to urge him to think things out for himself, to make up his own mind. The Georgist philosophy which would establish economic freedom uses intellectual freedom to get itself known. The graduates may think they want to "get together" but when they do, they find themselves making up their own individual minds about things. This is a good thing in itself—but it is fatal for collective action.

But the individualist propensity of Georgists does accomplish the biggest, most important job of the Henry George move-



ment—the teaching. Whether he does it by class, by a lecture, a conversation, a letter—the school man is a teacher.

Another question that frequently comes up is whether *Progress and Poverty* should continue to be used as our textbook; and a related question, or criticism, is that our students are not sufficiently broad in their outlook. To take the latter first—here again, our friendly critic doesn't realize he is flattering us—for he wants our student, Mr. Anybody, to go through our ten-lesson course and come out an expert economist, logician, prophet, politician, martyr and

all-round good fellow. While we can't always deliver the goods, I will say this—that there is a high rate of motivation among our students to keep learning, to expand their horizons. And this brings us to the other question—for I believe that the use of *Progress and Poverty* is largely responsible for this motivation. The charge of narrowness was justified, I think, in the case of many pre-school aficionados, and one reason for their narrowness is that they were *not* conversant with *Progress and Poverty*. They had picked up a phrase here and there and reduced the whole thing to a pat formula with which they could go around slugging people. *Progress and Poverty* is a liberal education in itself as some of the world's ablest scholars will testify. A careful study of it does not narrow the mind but broadens it. It is still the school's best resource. Nothing better has yet come along. Until it does, we had better remember what happened to the movement once before, when *Progress and Poverty* was given up.

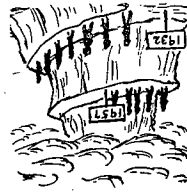
The problem of doing our educational job more effectively remains. Here we get many criticisms—and these I cannot answer as confidently as the above criticisms, for I can only agree—we *should* do a better job. With the desire to tell nothing less than the whole world our message, we are doomed to everlasting neurotic discontent until we achieve that goal.

To our sincere critics I can only say this: An organization by its very nature must be conservative. If the school sometimes seems to be in a rut, it is in the rut that we think will lead it forward. New ideas can and should be tried by those who have faith in them—if they succeed, well, it's a case of the better mouse-trap. But the school cannot very well throw open its entire resources to an untried new idea, or go off on a new tangent without serious repercussions. Do not,

however, stop presenting new ideas, and do not get discouraged if something isn't done right away. Give it time. Lots of things that are now standard practice in the school were once far-fetched ideas—like our contributing membership plan, the translation of our courses into other languages, the holding of annual national conferences, etc.

The Henry George School was founded for a purpose. I wrote a book about the founding and called it *A Seed Was Sown*. That's it—the school is a *growth*. This may seem animistic, but I sometimes feel that the school has an almost organic sentience. It seems to know what elements to absorb for its growth, and what elements to reject. Sooner or later the things

that would make the school other than what was implicit in its seed, get spewed forth.



And now for the final and biggest question of all: What prospect is there for achieving the basic economic teachings of Henry George? It would be rash to try to answer that one in this article. But it is not rash to say that the school is making progress toward that ultimate goal. Who, where, when, what, how—we don't know. But you and I know that it *will* be a reality some day.

(The End)