

The Georgist Philosophy And the Atom

By Robert Clancy

From the moment of that atomic blast in August 1945 that was heard 'round the world, we have entered what has been called "the atomic age." Never before have people defined their own era with such precision. And never, in so short a time, have people said and thought so much about it. That infinitesimal point of energy, the atom, has leaped into the foreground of our consciousness. It has reoriented our whole outlook on life. A new science, a new literature, a new politics have sprung up overnight.

How fundamental the change is remains to be seen. Meanwhile preachers thunder forth a new Doomsday from their pulpits. Scientists tell us that we have on the one hand a key to a new Industrial Revolution and on the other the road to annihilation. Commentators have something new to tell us every day about atomic developments. Educators are grappling with the problem, hoping the human race can be educated in time. Legislators, politicians, statesmen deliberate and wrangle about controlling the new force, bringing to the problem the old standards, while in their meeting halls lurks the spectre of annihilation. And ordinary folk whisper fearfully of the atomic bomb, hoping that somehow their leaders will solve the problem of human survival.

Nobody wants to face the consequences of the atomic bomb, and nobody seems to want to do anything about it—that is, change any of our present ways of doing things to avoid the consequences. The atomic bomb is even frequently spoken of as though it were an

outside force threatening us before which we are helpless.

And so an impetus has been given to a new philosophy of despair—a philosophy that tells us that man is doomed to annihilation and that all we can do is make life interesting for the time being.

Has the atom any meaning other than a threat to our existence? Can we find in it anything but a philosophy of despair?

Long before the atomic bomb made its dramatic entrance and long before he founded the Henry George School, Oscar H. Geiger followed closely the discoveries scientists were making about the atom. These discoveries, at the turn of the present century, were revolutionizing our ideas on the nature of the material universe. The old model of the universe, solid and substantial, was disintegrating. A new concept was needed. And Geiger formulated a philosophy of life, a concept of the universe, based on the atom.

This, in brief, is what Geiger taught:

Modern science tells us that the atom is the base of all matter, and that it is composed of protons as a nucleus and electrons as miniature "planets" whirling about the protons. It is in the incredibly rapid and complex motions of these units that is created all the forms of matter there are. Thus, matter is only an appearance created by energy or a constantly changing condition.

These electrons and protons have their origin in a substance that pervades all space, and they are but localized expressions of that substance which we call the "Ether." The Ether being universal, all creation is a unit.

Since energy is the result of a more basic factor, and that factor is not material, it is spiritual. Thus, creation is a spiritual unit.

This truth, Geiger held, must be the basis of any philosophy of life.

Geiger was an ardent disciple of Henry George. He saw a rela-

tion between his "atomic philosophy" and the realization of Henry George's ideals.

The implication of the atom is the unity of all creation. When this is more widely understood, Geiger said, the unity of all mankind will be more deeply appreciated. Once recognized, this principle of Unity would make the welfare of all the concern of each, and the welfare of each the concern of all. With this truth accepted, the rightful individual ownership of wealth and the rightful social ownership of the earth would be recognized and expressed in legislation.

Thus taught Oscar Geiger. He died eleven years before the atomic bomb was introduced. Perhaps he was too far ahead of this time. But today his message has more significance.

Mankind does not make fundamental changes except in times of crisis. In the present crisis, we are forced to make the welfare of each the concern of all. We may yet come closer to the ideals for which Georgists are striving. If not, another kind of unity is awaiting us—the unity of annihilation.