A Word With You

A COUPLE of fellows from ancient Greece—Eratosthenes and Aristarchus—made some important astronomical discoveries about the earth and the sun.

Erat—let's just call them Ernie and Archie. Ernie decided the earth was round, and he came close to giving its right measurements. He even noticed that the earth tilted on its axis. Archie went further still. He said the earth revolved around the sun and gave distances that, while not exactly accurate, were a long way closer to the truth than anything up to that time.

These brilliant discoveries were outcomes of observations, calculations, deductions which could be demonstrated. Why were they not accepted? Why did the world have to wait 1600 years before the same ideas were broached again?

For one thing, the empirical data was small, and the amount of thinking required was great—so there were two strikes against them. Strike three was the fact that these ideas went against the accepted notions of polite society—so polite society did the only thing it knows how to do in such cases—it ignored them.

Ptolemy came along and presented the more acceptable notion that the earth was the center of the universe, and that the heavenly bodies moved in accordance with the meditations of the philosophers. It was not that this theory fitted the facts better—it simply fitted prejudices better.

Henry George made important discoveries in the economic world. Like Ernie and Archie, he worked without an arsenal of statistics and equipment, using instead "the familiar facts of intelligent observation." Like them, too, his ideas were lost in the shuffle and ignored by polite society.

Today's batteries of computing machines, statistical bureaus and research agencies are at the service of economic theories which, like the Ptolemaic theory, are a maze of inconsistencies and complexities which fail to add up to a coherent explanation of economic society.

Indeed if polite society ever takes note of our Georgist ideas, it is generally with two reproaches: first, that it is impolite of us to offer a simple explanation of economics when (with the help of fallacious theories) it is really a hopelessly muddled subject. The other reproach is that we haven't got miles and miles of statistics.

This latter reproach is really very impolite of polite society. After all, they're the ones who have all the equipment and research facilities. Instead of picking on us, they ought to test our theories with their facilities.

On the other hand, perhaps the familiar facts of intelligent observation suffice for those who have eyes to see.

—Robert Clancy

Vol. 26, No. 9 **August, 1963**

The Henry George News, published monthly by the Henry George School of Social Science, 50 E. 69th Street, New York 21, N.Y., supports the following principle:

Publication committee: William S. O'Connor, Arnold A. Weinstein and Lancaster M. Greene, chairman. Editor: Alice Elizabeth Davis. Subscriptions $2 a year; single copies 20c. Second class postage paid at New York N.Y

The community, by its presence and activity, gives rental value to land, therefore the rent of land belongs to the community and not to the landowners. Labor and capital, by their combined efforts, produce the goods of the community—known as wealth. This wealth belongs to the producers. Justice requires that the government, representing the community, collect the rent of land for community purposes and abolish the taxation of wealth.