

WANTED—MORE LIGHT

By ROBERT CLANCY

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Last December we published a controversial "Personally Speaking" article by Dr. James Busey, associate professor of political science at the University of Colorado. Dr. Busey proposed that an International Liberty Party should be formed as the most evident answer to poverty, tyranny, and war. Mr. Clancy here discusses the practical difficulties and offers a suggestion.

THE interesting article, "Wanted—A Freedom Party" by James D. Busey in your December issue invites a reply from the educational wing of the Georgeist movement. Although Dr. Busey criticises the movement's concentration upon education, I think we are both in agreement in wanting to see ultimate world acceptance and adoption of the Georgeist philosophy.

Dr. Busey criticises single taxers (or Georgeists, which term shall we use ?) for their failure to organise politically, and in fact he proposes the formation of a party on an international scale.

Speaking for the movement in the U.S.A., there have actually been several attempts to organise the single tax movement politically. The first was in Henry George's day, when the United Labor Party was formed in 1887, after the memorable 1886 election; and in 1897, for George's second mayoralty campaign, the Democracy of Thomas Jefferson Party was formed. There were numerous state and local political organisations between George's day and 1932. There was even a national Single Tax Party which entered the Presidential election in 1920, and again in 1924 under the name of the Commonwealth Land Party. The problem was that there was not enough of a concentration of membership anywhere to be taken seriously politically. The situation grew worse and worse with the passing years, although the single taxers were as eager as any one could be to build up their numbers. There were also unceasing efforts to put the single tax proposal into a simple form that could be given mass distribution. It was not from any shyness on the part of single taxers that by 1932 there was left only a handful of ageing adherents.

It was the educational effort that changed this sorry state of affairs. Oscar Geiger—businessman, philosopher, street-corner orator and Georgeist, who had been through the political campaigns—realised that a more thorough educational job had to be done, and he set about doing that job by founding the Henry George School. It is not too much to say that he thereby rescued the Georgeist philosophy from oblivion. There are great numbers of adherents nowadays, but still not enough for a political party.

Dr. Busey complains that education alone cannot reach more than 10 per cent of the population. Lord, if we could only reach that 10 per cent ! Imagine 17 million Georgeists in the United States ! Anyway, we go on educating and winning converts. If it could be done any

other way—any quicker, easier way—it would surely be done, in accordance with the first axiom of human behaviour. There is hardly any method or idea that you can dream up that wasn't tried out during the past seventy-five years.

Dr. Busey mentions some other "terribly serious concerns" on which I comment in the order in which he lists them:

1. He criticises the "semi-idolatry" of Henry George in the single tax movement. I think "semi-idolatry" is too strong a term. There is great admiration for George—but after all, few enough people in the world have achieved things that rank with George's work—Moses, Columbus, Newton, Pasteur—and they are all remembered and honoured. Why not ? George's followers are not so fatuous as to regard him as infallible; where necessary, they disagree vociferously with him.

2. Dr. Busey detects unamiable right-wing tendencies among single taxers and thinks they are "making noises like the National Association of Manufacturers." George wasn't like that, he reminds us. (Reflect for a moment, Dr. Busey, on the absurdity of chiding single taxers for idolising George and then chiding them for not following George right down the line.) Single taxers are not as Darwinistic as Dr. Busey thinks they are. After all, they stand for a basic reform for the sake of human rights. In the matter of government interference in business and burdensome taxation, we happen to agree with the N.A.M., so what other kind of noises should we make ? Surely, Dr. Busey does not equate "business" with "special privilege" ?

3. Dr. Busey scolds the *Progress and Poverty* Georgeists for still refuting the outmoded Malthusian and wage-fund theories. How can he think that "Malthus is dead" ? Every organ of communication one turns to these days carries stories by experts on the current "explosion of population" in the world, predicting disastrous consequences and affirming that Malthus was right ! As for the wage-fund theory, practically all labour unions are committed to this view, and practically every industry boasts about how many jobs it "gives."

4. Perhaps Dr. Busey thinks that an international political party is so grand an idea that it would be petty to say that we haven't enough strength in any locality. But that's what politics gets down to—marshalling numbers of voters in the election districts. Without that, a political party is doomed to suffer defeat after defeat—and how long

are you going to have a political organisation under those conditions? But even before you get to the defeat, you have to start the organisation. I suggest that Dr. Busey try a few meetings in his own town with a view to organising a Single Tax, or Freedom Party. Assuming we get past the first obstacle that not enough people are interested (where does he think there are enough?), I would ask him to observe what happens when he tries to make the single tax palatable to the non-single tax members, and make palatable to single taxers his programme on foreign affairs, civil rights, labour problems, etc., which he thinks must be included.

If Dr. Busey would rather be spared such a contretemps (as I would), I have an alternative programme to suggest. I think that Dr. Busey is just the man to undertake an objective study of the world-wide single tax movement, past and present. He is a professor of political and social science as well as a Georgeist and he could thereby make a distinctive and valuable contribution. The study of our movement as a movement has been undeservedly neglected, not only by scholars generally but by ourselves. There are and have been many experiences, activities, political as well as educational, literature, organisations, individual efforts, and different manifestations in different countries (including, notably, the Justice Party of Denmark). We need to learn more about the conditions under which advances have been made, or setbacks suffered. The last factual survey was done in 1917, and that only for one country—*The Single Tax Movement in the United States* by Dr. Arthur Nichols Young. An up-to-date work. not

only by a scholar but by a Georgeist interested in the movement, could serve as a valuable guide.

At the 1955 International Conference in St. Andrews I broached the subject of the nature of the Georgeist movement. I concluded (with misgivings and based on an inadequate survey) that our movement was more successful with its educational work than with its organisational work; that its function seemed to be to expound the basic Georgeist philosophy to the world, to pass it on to society; and I have speculated that it will be non-Georgeist or semi-Georgeist organisers and leaders who will be the practitioners. This interpretation is not entirely to my own liking, and I am willing that it be refuted, but such a refutation should be based on some knowledgeable discernment.

I want to add that single taxers, or Georgeists, are not inactive politically, even though they may not be organised. Several in the U.S.A. have started on political careers, others have exercised visible influence on legislation. There is a groundswell of effort in many different fields, far more effective, I am sure, than could be obtained through an organised structure. If Dr. Busey says, Look at the Communists, my answer is, We are not Communists, we have to find our own way. That is why I appeal to him to give a more thorough study to the Georgeist movement—to help us find our way forward.

[We hope to publish next month a critique of Dr. Busey's proposals by Dr. Glenn E. Hoover, emeritus professor of Economics at Mills College, Oakland, California.]

RIGHTS

By W. HARTLEY BOLTON, of Dorset

IT IS a commonplace for human beings everywhere to claim their "rights," but the innumerable interpretations of "rights" are responsible for most of the deplorable conditions of our chaotic social state and there is no word in the language of mankind so misleading.

To classify these interpretations is difficult but, broadly, they fall into three categories, namely:

- (a) supernatural;
- (b) natural; and
- (c) scientific.

From the supernatural point of view, gods have endowed man with life and the means of continuing existence. Countless generations of men have existed on the assumption that they had god-given rights to life and have considered the taking of life as murder and the appropriation of someone else's property as crime. Perhaps the highest development of this theological belief in "rights" is the "Divine Right of Kings."

Natural rights have evolved from the supernatural. No longer do the gods bestow rights; it is beneficent Mother Nature who provides the basis of man's existence. The argument is: It is natural for human beings to propagate their species and, therefore, natural that they should be

fed, clothed and sheltered and "Nature" is the great providence. Here we have the "Rights of Man."

The scientific outlook attempts to regulate man's claims in accordance with scientific law. It is here that man's moral actions are related to economic laws and a new meaning given to the term "rights."

There is, of course, in practice, no clear line of demarcation separating these divisions and overlapping anomalies are obvious. This is due, first, to the fact that man's conceptions of "rights" evolve through three stages: theological, metaphysical and scientific, and, second, to the fact that some minds are more advanced than others. Indeed, the question of "rights" is treated by most people theologically or metaphysically and only a very few men have reached scientific explanations. "Thou shalt not steal" implies that the possessors of property have theological rights to it irrespective of how it was obtained. The Declaration of the Rights of Man adopted by the French National Assembly in August 1789, the English Bill of Rights, the American Declaration of Independence and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin's "Vindication of the Rights of Women," although still linked with the god-idea, are chiefly metaphysical.