

A Word With You

I ASK seriously, not cynically, "Will mankind ever learn?" Have we absorbed enough of the dreadful mistakes of the past not to repeat them?

It is easy enough to look upon past history and say, this was right, that was wrong. Can we be as sure of the actions being taken today? Are we quite certain that tomorrow we will shun the false prophets and welcome the preachers of righteousness? Even if the false prophets tell us things that are soothing to the ear?

We are properly indignant about those greedy colonists who brought slavery to the New World, and we believe that belongs to the benighted past. Yet the newest country in the world, Rhodesia, is based upon the separation of the white and black races into ruling and serving hierarchies.

Newcomers to those African countries where such discrimination is practised are known as "boat converts." En route, they are eloquent in their denunciations of the system; upon arrival, they are magically transformed and accept the master-servant facts of life like old pros.

And one of the facts of life we must reckon with is the powerful pull of our social environment. Civil rights demonstrators who descend upon a sleepy southern town bring their own social environment which fortifies them. But a lone migrant who goes to live in the South and, however liberal

his views may have been, perforce becomes immersed in the customs and habits of this new milieu—he sings a different tune. Give him six months and instead of "we shall overcome," he'll be whistling Dixie.

One recurring weakness of human nature is the tendency to feel that "if I am doing it, it must be all right," whether it's an error of the past, or some perverse ideology or a special privilege — the same things that in others make us furious.

So we'd better not be too smug about the past—or those parts of the present we don't like. If we were sitting in the Roman Colosseum, the chances are we'd be howling for blood; later on we would contentedly watch the burning of a witch or heretic; and today, while we heroically mutter, "I'd rather be dead than red," let us also mutter a prayer that we'll not be put to the test.

Is there any chance, then, for "right thinking" as against the overwhelming pressures of the social environment? Perhaps this can only be answered by allegory—the same allegory used by Henry George when he referred to the endless struggle of Ormuzd and Ahri-man. Mighty as are the forces of ignorance, conformity and corruption, we feel intuitively that somehow the forces of knowledge, liberty and progress are just a little stronger.

—Robert Clancy

Vol. 29, No. 3

March, 1966

The Henry George News, published monthly by the Henry George School of Social Science, 50 E. 69th Street, New York, N.Y. 10021, supports the following principle:

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.

Publication committee: William S. O'Connor, Arnold A. Weinstein and Lancaster M. Greene, chairman. Editor: Alice Elizabeth Davis. Subscriptions \$1 a year; single copies 10c. Second class postage paid at New York, N. Y.

The Henry George News does not assume responsibility for opinions expressed in signed articles.