

The School of the Future

By EZRA COHEN

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MY GOOD wife, who is sitting at the back table over there, happens to hold a little piece of land down in Connecticut. The outstanding feature about that little plot is that it has a tree. It is an oak tree, probably 80 years to 160 years old.

That oak tree has experienced a great deal of difficulty in the past. Many of the branches have been cut from it and yet, according to experts, the tree will live for many years, possibly hundreds of years to come. However, it will always have problems and will need special care.

One of the characteristics of an oak tree is that while it has beautiful foliage and extended branches overhead, it is supposed to have the same area of roots underneath. It is a very interesting thing to note that during the two recent hurricanes in which many of the trees were bowled over, the oak tree stood its ground.

This school, like the oak tree, has its problems, and we have to have people watch it every moment of the time to prevent interference with its development and progress. It's got to go on and it can live for many, many years to come. It can also bear acorns that will, in turn, plant themselves (if the squirrels give them a chance), and we can watch other oak trees grow. I personally believe that the problem of the school is to make enough teachers to bear fruit in the future when we do want to go to the people at large. Meanwhile, we have to train people to handle crowds and, mind you, I mean just what I say—to handle the *crowds*—because at some point along the line somebody is going to come up with an idea that will catch the imagination of the people.

Many Competing Interests

Right at the moment we have competition. Naturally it's difficult to get students. Why should people look into our "proposition"? Why should they classify our "proposition" as more sensible, more desirable, than any of the other isms or angles they are presented with every day in the press, TV and radio? We have to be patient and we have to keep hammering away, and there's no other way we know of that's the right way to do it.

You can't depend on the newspapers to do anything for us other than to catch a news item here and there and you can't depend on the colleges, because both the colleges and the press are trying to make things pay. People register for courses at college because they want to learn certain things and, frankly, there aren't enough people who want to learn our stuff yet. Otherwise, the colleges would put it in and be really serious about it. The same is true of newspapers. They won't give us space because they are trying to sell their space for advertising. If we come up with anything that will help them, then naturally they will put us in, but otherwise they won't. We have another problem. When we do get students it's difficult to hold them. Those who are giving the course in *Progress and Poverty* known that until you get through the sixth lesson you don't know whether you have a student or not. After that there is enough beauty in *Progress and Poverty* to hold them.

It was a tough job to get a school started (as every one of you know) and it's only in the last five or ten years that we realize we have

something here that is worthwhile and that we can be proud of. And I also venture to say that if Oscar Geiger were alive today, and even Henry George, and they saw all that the philosophy had to go through after that time and during that time, and realized just what was happening today, far-flung as it is, they would not only be surprised, but very much gratified.

We don't want to take a defeatist attitude. We want to feel in our hearts and souls that we are going somewhere and we *are*. We want to be enthusiastic about it all the time and this enthusiasm will be contagious.

The Board of Trustees in New York is interested particularly in an over-all policy. We have not arrived at the point where we can go to the general public. I want to say this in passing. The talent that we have in the school's teachers today could never be bought at any price. There is a certain earnestness—a certain desire to go all out in their efforts to obtain results—that I believe is unlike anything else. I can't think of another institution of this kind where people do go all out, not being paid, to put a thing over. The zeal that is displayed is most refreshing.

Time—The Big Element

And that brings me to the matter of timing. How long is this thing going to take? Some people are about to get impatient, and we can understand it. But we have to deal with conditions as they are. We know you can't put it over quickly through the school. If there is anybody who knows another way of putting it over quickly, well—fine. It's wonderful. But through the school it's got to take time, and it's got to take plenty of time.

I might give you a hint about our long range program. We are toying with the idea of planning as much as fifteen years ahead. Now that seems stupid in a way and yet we think it has to be done. It was one of Henry George's dreams to establish what might be called a Henry George University—a graduate school which would be accredited. It can be done but it involves a lot of work and a lot of time and a lot of support. We have to take likely candidates, young people of today who are willing to devote their lives to this particular thing, just as anyone would devote himself to a career. We would have to provide for them through the years, probably providing for scholarships all the way through, so that at the end of five or ten years we would have a nucleus of a group of professors, assistant professors and instructors. Then we could start a Henry George University. It might take fifteen years, but if we don't start on it now somebody else will have to start it fifteen years from now or ten years from now and then it is going to take another ten or fifteen years after that to do it. On the other hand, it may come to fruition before any of us realize.

Like the frog in the churn who kept alive by resolutely swimming until the cream turned into butter, we Georgists, too, have got to keep swimming around with a purpose.

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