

Apprehension

By LEAH DAGEN

*A student speech given at the
Henry George School Rally in June*

MISS AGNES DE MILLE was recently quoted as saying that when a woman has a child, she apprehends the world. As the word implies, one becomes aware of, and understands one's role in the scheme of things. I agree with that statement by its very identification with my own experience. From the moment of birth, the child that is brought forth into this so troubled world has much to learn. As is so often the case, that learning process can be a most painful one. One can flounder around for years, bewildered and puzzled about the "why" of things, and not know what to do about getting the right answers.

My childhood and adolescence were spent in a tough and dangerous section of this city. In the last depression, I experienced marriage and motherhood that was tied in with abject poverty. That poverty was searingly painful, for there were times when I did not know where my next meal would be coming from. My protest against all of this was without direction, bewildered, and confused, with a feeling of utter hopelessness.

The beginning awareness of what must be done, can be pin-pointed for me from the day, only a few short months ago, when, as I headed for a symposium on "Human Values in a Mechanized Society"—in this very building and this very auditorium [Hunter College, New York] I was given a card by one of the people from the Henry George School. I sent in the card and registered for a course in economics.

My formal education was a very limited one. The learning process really began for me with the first day in class. I had much to learn. It was made easy—but not too easy, by the excellent Socratic method that is used in our classrooms. Many of my preconceived notions were aired—encouraged as I was by the fatherly, and relaxed attitude of the instructor. Along with the airing came a careful tearing apart of much personal misinformation. One discards, gladly, what was wrong—a reshuffling of ideas takes place, and one acquires, slowly, a clarification of old ones . . . that are solid and will stay with one, because they are truths—basic truths. The discipline of this process is such that some cannot "take" it, having come into the course with the idea that it would be an easy one. Nothing comes easy—especially knowledge. So, slowly, one learns that, as in all experience, one must work hard for what is important. No longer does one feel at a loss for the answers, and with the knowledge gained, another hunger takes place. This hunger is one of the mind, and one that will never be sated . . . for it is the desire to learn more and more of the answers to the "why."

No longer do I feel impoverished, for I have become one with the world of learning and with the understanding that I must work hard, but will be richly rewarded for this effort with a richness that no wealth can buy, and one that no economic changes can take from me. In place of the darkness of frustration because of ignorance, I have acquired a love of wisdom, and, with the growing desire to investigate the facts and principles of reality and of human nature and conduct, I have, truly, at last, apprehended my world.