

Staving off social collapse

WHILE THE POOR experience privations, the wealthier parts of the world have quite recently come to suffer in different, and apparently unrelated, ways.

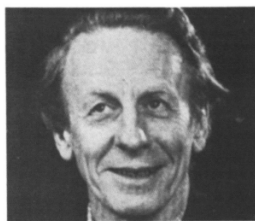
Until the 1970s, it was widely believed that the spectre of mass-unemployment had been banished forever from developed countries. Today this is very clearly not the case.

In some countries, unemployment is still rising. In others, formal unemployment is low or even completely absent; but those countries frequently experience military conscription and employ great numbers of people in 'defence' activities. In all advanced countries great numbers of people seem to be employed — often by governments — in functions which appear of little value either to the individuals concerned or to the community.

It is often said that all production essential for a high standard of material well-being can be achieved by a small fraction of the present labour-force; and if that is not true today it almost certainly will become true in the near future in consequence of technological improvements. Yet there is much to suggest that a "leisure state" would be for most people a great disaster; that few people desire prolonged idleness, and that many people are quite literally killed by it.

The association between labour and production has been so close throughout all human experience, from the most primitive hunter-gatherers to the most sophisticated dwellers in advanced civilizations, that until recently it has appeared almost complete, save for activities which were recognised by all as hobbies or entertainments.

Some people once thought that industrialism would bring in the "leisure state". They were proved wrong, or perhaps premature, in



ROY DOUGLAS concludes his analysis of the relationship between the philosophies of the Greens and Georgists, by focusing on the prospects for The Leisure Society.

their judgements. Technological improvements have created new "needs" so rapidly that most people have continued to work hours not much shorter than those of their remote ancestors; although the rewards they have drawn from their labour have vastly exceeded the rewards obtained by earlier generations.

Yet we are now reaching a point where (as "Greens" have rightly recognised), further dramatic advances in living standards, at least among the developed peoples, are likely to trench on the environment to such an extent that irreparable damage and perhaps social collapse as well, must necessarily result.

GEORGISTS and "Greens" both have important contributions to offer in the direction of a solution to this appalling problem.

The Georgist doctrine that people have equal rights to "land" means that authorities which have been freely chosen by those peoples may rightfully prescribe the use of particular pieces of land in the general interest of all. "Greens", equally justly assert that much land should be preserved in a more or less "natural" condition, or even should be allowed to revert to that condition from its present use; but they

also emphasise that land which is employed for production should be used to the best effect without damage to its future use.

These doctrines are complimentary not contradictory.

Environmental conservation, however, is not just a passive process of leaving "nature" alone, with minimal human interference. People are likely to show much more interest in the conservation of nature if they are able to see a lot of nature for themselves, and understand something of how nature "works". Intelligent conservation therefore implies, for example, the provision of access routes, and many different kinds of educational programmes and literature. The satisfaction of such needs is often highly labour-intensive.

Wise nature management entails a great many other positive human actions as well. In the remote past, for example, woodlands or prairies or even areas of the oceans were often "conserved" by complex interactions between organisms which today are scarce or extinct, and which for a variety of reasons cannot be replaced by adequate natural substitutes.

The best mankind can do to "conserve" such environments today requires a great many positive activities:

- coppicing trees in one place, devising engineering works to preserve wetlands in another;
- planting trees in some places and cutting them down in others;
- destroying harmful introduced species, or actively encouraging the reintroduction of species locally extinct.

These activities are, if anything, even more labour-intensive than the former kind of "conservation". Ecology, which will certainly become increasingly im-

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BACKING LACKING

AFTER one of his short trips back to England, Aylmer Maude was asked by Tolstoy to report on the progress being made towards adopting Henry George's reforms.

Maud later recorded* the conversation:

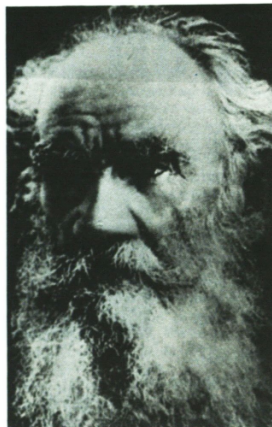
"He asked me... how the single-tax movement was getting on. I said that I thought it was a small movement not making much way.

"How is that, when the question is one of such enormous importance?"

"I said I thought that the great majority of Englishmen were too conservative to attend to it, and the Socialists and other advanced parties had gone past Henry George and recognised interest, and private property in the means of production, as being also wrong.

"That is a pity," said Tolstoy. "If the Conservatives are too conservative to attend to it, and the advanced parties have gone past it, who is to do this work that so urgently needs doing?"

* Quoted from Aylmer Maude, Tolstoy and his Problems. London: Constable (1902?)



● Leo Tolstoy

MINIMAL GOVERNMENT

LEO TOLSTOY was an anarchist. He believed that fundamental Christian ethics based on love and non-violence were sufficient to regulate man's activities. This enabled the Communists, led by Lenin, to paint the great author as an idealist who had little to say about practical affairs.

In fact, Tolstoy campaigned hard during the last 25 years of his life — he died in 1910 — for reforms which he considered to be eminently practical. At the heart of his proposals was a change in Russia's land tenure and tax systems. He wanted a Single Tax on land values, a fiscal policy which he adopted from American social reformer, Henry George, whose books he first read in 1885. Tolstoy commended the reform to the Tsars, claiming that the Single Tax would abolish the conditions creating civil unrest.

Tolstoy realised that his proposal entailed minimal government

— which contradicted his heart-felt preference for no government at all. His friend and translator, Aylmer Maude, noted the apparent contradiction. But Tolstoy had an answer: "The great majority of people still believe in governments and legality — then let them, at least, that they get good laws, he declared."

Maud wrote: "It appears to him utterly wrong that we should maintain laws which will make those who work the land in the next generation dependent on a small number who will be born possessed of the land. That a few of the strongest, cleverest, or most grasping of the labourers may meanwhile succeed in becoming landlords does not mend matters.

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portant in conservation, is a science no less complex and intellectually demanding than any other science, and the development of ecology to ensure the most effective conservation of the environment will require a growing corpus of highly trained scientists and technologists.

There is every reason for thinking that the demand for human labour in a society properly concerned with the environment will be quite enough to ensure the achievement of "full employment".

IF, THEN, we are moving rapidly towards a society in which the

demand for productive labour will be greatly reduced, and yet the labour in conservation and conservation-linked aspects of education and science will increase no less rapidly, it will be necessary to offer employment in such activities on a scale several orders of magnitude greater than that applying at present.

If sceptics reply that this will prove immensely costly, they are right; but it will probably prove little if any less costly than to pay people for living in the kind of enforced idleness which — as current experience shows — en-

courages vandalism and crime.

It is important to remember that conservation work may well have an element of production in it. Most kinds of forestry and woodland activity, for example, yields valuable timber. It is by no means inevitable that such activity should be conducted by public authorities. Profit-making bodies, such as workers' co-operatives or private corporations may well play a substantial, and perhaps a dominant part — although, of course, there must be strict overall control to prevent environmental damage resulting.

Tolstoy torm

LEO TOLSTOY sent the following appreciation of the Single Tax philosophy to Bernard Eulenstein, leader of the Single Tax Party in Berlin:

AT THE present time the expansion of man's knowledge in reference to the use of land goes on, and it would appear to me, the process of putting this thought into action must soon commence.

In these processes, which from a social point of view form the chief lessons of our time, Henry George was and is the pioneer and leader of the movement. Herein his paramount importance rests. He has, by his excellent works, materially contributed both to the improving of people's ideas on this question as well as to their direction on a practical basis.

It is curious that in regard to the question of the abolition of the clearly unnatural monopoly of land, we have an exact repetition of what, in our opinion, happened when slavery was abolished both in Russia and America.

The government and the ruling classes, recognising in their inner consciousness that in the question of land was contained the solution of

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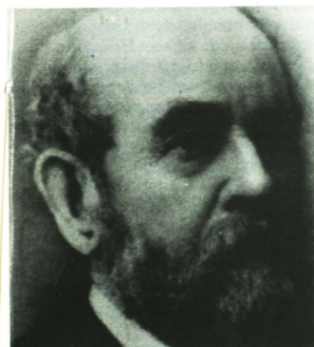
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● Henry George