

# Do You Stand on Your Principles?



## Another View By an Observer

**S**PEAKING of the principles of the modern economists as opposed to the classical, Howard L. Freeman in an address at the Henry George School on April 9th said, "I see George as fitting into the classical ideal. The George philosophy can be presented so it doesn't violate any of the classical principles, and that is the only way I accept it."

He said there were just two economic viewpoints: either freedom causes evils in society or it does not. If it does, the modern economist is right. It is then feasible to pass laws preventing individuals from doing things, i.e., curtailing liberty. If freedom does not cause evils, then instead of passing new laws one should look for the laws that have caused the evils and repeal them.

Adam Smith wrote the first book on classical economics, and those who reject his view Mr. Freeman classified as modern economists. Smith laid down principles but didn't follow them out. George did. The speaker proceeded to make an interesting case for absolute severity in adhering to principle, while adding ruefully that in Australia a sharp division had arisen between the left and right. [See below].

While Mr. Freeman's topic was "Classical vs. Modern Economics," he said it might equally well have been "Christian vs. Humanitarian Economics," since the classical economists, for the most part, believe in God while the modern economists, for the most part, do not.

According to Adam Smith and the classical view, evils are not caused by freedom. Smith saw evils in Britain but he looked for the cause and saw the noxious corn (small grains) laws. He then told the government that what it needed was not more laws but fewer laws. Citing a Scripture passage, the speaker described this as a search for the "laws of man that violate the perfect law of God."

The humanitarians, following Marx, developed a concern over the evils in society, but they couldn't believe Smith because they said there *was no* guiding hand. But if there was no God there should nevertheless be some order, so this group proposed that the government should set up departments of agriculture, travel bureaus, etc. Naturally evils of unemployment

arose, but these were thought to be the result of freedom.

Curiously enough, the Socialists, who often want to pass a law preventing people from exercising some freedom, believing this to be the cure for an existing evil, are usually the first to come up with, "if everyone was a Christian there would be no need to pass this law."

In New Zealand, noting that many of the churches were almost empty, the church people got a law passed making people close their shops on Sunday and curtailing trolley service. The beaches are crowded but the churches are still empty—they didn't make men moral by passing the law.

In emphasizing the Christian vs. humanitarian view the matter of principles comes into focus with this example. A man passes a widow on the street, she is in need and he, being a good Christian and wishing to follow such principles as he knows, gives her \$5. He knows it will not do much toward alleviation of her needs, but he has done something toward living up to a principle. Nor does he criticize a miserly bystander who, though a man of means, may not have given anything.

Another spectator takes the humanitarian point of view—he seeks ends. He is well aware of the other man who could contribute \$5,000 as easily as he could give \$5. So he reasons thus: if I can cause the total situation to be changed so the miser will be forced to help the widow, that will be promoting an action which will be satisfactory in the end (and he will still have his \$5).

This man is making a choice between right and wrong. But, said the speaker, this illustrates the lesser of the two gospels set forth in the Christian Bible. Neophytes are taught to choose between right and wrong, but that is merely the "milk" gospel. The more advanced "meat" gospel concerns the choice between the good and the best.

And here we come to the real heart of the issue concerning principles. Said Mr. Freeman, citing as a Biblical analogy the temptation by Satan in the New Testament, whoever chooses good rather than best (truth) is not forgiven, for the sin of knowing best and doing good in place of it is unforgivable.

The person who has principles and follows them, turning neither to the right nor left, has a valuable contribution to make, and he is a very necessary person. Principles have a tendency to stabilize or to set challenging standards by which one may judge direction. Persons are however, always to be considered of primary importance—principles having been made for human beings and not human beings for principles.

Principles are certainly valuable indicators of the way in which human life should develop, and their worth must be recognized. Nevertheless, considering the difference and variety of conditions encountered in human nature, it seems likely that for the present, principles can be little more than the goal, and not the final judgment.

As an analogy—pacifism is an ideal; but so many grades of conditions obtain in the world that unless pacifism were accepted universally, marked adherence to it in any one group might defeat the very purpose of it.

Similarly, in other fields, standards can and should be based on principles, but human life must be accepted wherever it is found, and must be dealt with in the best possible way, even though this falls short of the principle.

Any other attitude will have its place but, being merely academic, it will fail to touch realistically the sorrow of humanity. Taking public housing as an example, even if principles were followed completely, *as principles*, the results would be no better than some of the present criticized methods, unless the movement had previously been tintured by brotherly love. Or to put it another way, we can never realize a majority influence of all principles until some degree of divine motivation has been achieved, since without basic moral and spiritual purpose, even a full blown regime ushering in all our principles, would be like a mansion built for people who did not know how to use it.