

AN ANGLO-IRISHMAN ABROAD

by Ian Lambert

As an Anglo-Irishman based in the Caribbean, one of the delightful prospects for me is getting to know America and her people on first hand terms. I have visited Philadelphia, New York, Boston, New England, Orlando and New Mexico.

New York appalled me. I had no idea how run down that great city was; in England, pictures of Manhattan are always of gleaming skyscrapers and happy-go-lucky street vendors. I expected noise, filth, garish lights, bustling squalor. I did not expect cardboard tents in every street.

I did not expect to see that chilling look which the vagrant gives you – the look of someone who has gone beyond despair to the point of suppressing his thoughts in order to numb the pain of everyday living; it is the look of one of Henry George's "new barbarians".

For many, the American dream seems to be a nightmare.

There is a huge gulf today, in America as in Britain and the rest of the world, between the "haves" and the "have-nots".

One of the most puzzling features of American society is the lack of any remotely left wing, or even just plain working class, political parties or platforms. "Socialism" is still a dirty word.

In the millenium to come, the lack of any socialist ideology in American politics could prove to be an advantage while other countries venture upon the task of "desocialising". Yet, the breakdown of socialism in eastern Europe may pose a threat to the American politicians.

No longer can the "communist" and the "socialist" bogey cards be played by cheap politicians seeking to argue that, whatever their plight, the average American must be better off than he would be in any other country. Socialism has had the courage and humility to admit its failure. America now faces the prospect, in decades to come, of the eastern and other European economies, properly restructured, surpassing a debt-ridden United States in economic strength, just as Japan and West Germany have since the second World War.

The conspicuous growth in American state lotteries is an ominous sign. If you admit lotteries as serving a useful pur-

pose in a society's economy, it is a small step indeed to admitting real estate speculation.

Yet one could actually expect America to be the last home of the zero sum society.

Henry George saw the fear of poverty, not the love of wealth, as the great motivator behind the lust for acquiring wealth. Nowhere is this more true than in America today, where violently oscillating stock, bond and real estate markets can create and decimate fortunes; no-one, not even Drexell Burnham Lambert, is exempt from disaster.

The theme was never more poetically put than by Kahlil Gibran: "Is not the fear of thirst, when your well is full, the thirst that is unquenchable?"

America seems to be gripped in an unquenchable thirst for which neither capitalism nor socialism has the cure. There has never been a time when the structural problems which George foresaw, for America and the world, have become so acute.

There has never been a time when America has had so great an opportunity to send forth a prophet into the whole of mankind. All it requires is an admission of defeat; have America's politicians got the courage and humility to admit defeat?

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