

Georgism Today— Faults and Virtues

By ROBERT LUDLOW

WHY is it that very few people know about Georgism and yet there is hardly anyone who does not know about Marxism—at least by name. One reason for this, I believe, lies in the fact that Georgism, at least in its popular literature, is more narrowly economic than Marxism. That it assumes the existence of natural economic laws which operate automatically and inevitably and, if these laws be observed, the whole problem of poverty and injustice will be solved.

Marxism, similarly, holds to a narrowly economic interpretation of man and of history. Except that somewhere along the line, Marxists came to realize they had to appeal to more of man than his economic side. There was an inconsistent recognition of the spiritual nature of man; there was an appeal to ethical values.

While it is likewise true that we see this same recognition, this same appeal, in the works of Henry George, it is also undeniable that current Georgist literature is a dreary business and about as interesting as the financial page of *The New York Times*. And the great majority of people are not going out on a limb for the financial page of *The New York Times*. Nor will they see much to a program which sees nothing wrong with what is known historically as capitalism except that it lacks the single tax.

Not By Bread Alone

Even if laissez-faire, plus the single tax, were quite correct as an economic system, classical capitalism is still to be deplored for other, non-economic, reasons. Human beings cannot be fitted into mathematical formulas, some element in us will always escape the straight jacket of logic and some element in us will also escape the most reasonable of economic systems even when the logic of such systems are demonstrable. A Gandhi could bring to the people a new outlook and fire them with zeal. Correspondence courses in economics will hardly accomplish that.

There is also the question of the type of literature present day Georgism advertises and distributes. Much of it reads like publications of the National Association of Manufacturers—as such the appeal is to "hard-headed" business men. But the aspect of a business man's world is hardly an appealing one to man who desires more of life than the psychological isolation of a laissez-faire world. What Georgism lacks, then, is a philosophy of Community, a concept of conscious cooperation. Not in the Socialist sense, which George rightly opposed, but in the decentralized sense of autonomous Co-ops.

The Brighter Side

All of this seems most discouraging, yet there is another side. The Georgist movement never entangled itself in the dogmatic atheism of some of the leftism movements and, as such, did not close the doors to cooperation with religious-minded peoples. In this respect, and in

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others, the Georgists have shown themselves more open minded, more amenable to criticism and self-analysis, more "tolerant" of variations than most other anti-status-quo groups. And, in these days, when totalitarianism has its advocates from the Left as well as from the Right such a virtue is no small prize.

It may be that it is too late for any new economic system to be put into effect. Nevertheless we cannot proceed on that basis. And so we must keep in mind the fundamental theme of Henry George—that natural resources were made for the use of all mankind, that we must find some way of abolishing private exploitation of those resources, that we must seek to eliminate destitution from the earth.

Robert Ludlow is associate editor of *The Catholic Worker*, New York City. He formerly contributed articles to *Land and Freedom* edited by Robert Clancy from 1940 to 1942. We were tempted to change the title of this article to "Present Company Excepted," since the author admits he has been out of touch with Georgist publications lately.