

The Gist of Henry George

by Sydney A. Mayers

Since his writings and teachings consistently express his views without equivocation, Henry George can in no sense be "all things to all men." Yet among the many who subscribe to George's economic and social philosophy (even among those who understand it), there is wide divergence of opinion as to what the essence of George actually is. Were a dozen Georgists asked to specify the one element signifying the substance of George's principles, twelve different elements might be offered as the "essential" ones. Each could be a valid statement of a basic Georgist tenet, but possibly none would truly answer the question.

George's books, articles and speeches reflect an amazing depth and breadth of logical thinking. Being unbound by narrow preconceptions, his approach was comprehensive; he not only saw the forest, but he diligently examined every tree in it. With intellectual courage, he faced every obstacle and objection he could find. As a result, the material George bequeathed to mankind contains such an abundance of facts, ideas, arguments, conclusions and proposals that almost any of them is sufficient to support a complete school of thought. Regrettably, many "Georgists," going so far and no further, grasp but one of the many facets of George's philosophy, making that one aspect their view of the whole.

For example, to the proponents of the single tax, George seems to mean a fiscal reform, merely serving the good purpose of removing the burden of general taxation. Then there are those who see evil in the private appropriation of land rent; this they would abolish by the public collection of land values. Others look to George to eliminate speculation in land, to prevent industrial depressions, or to arrest the decline of civilization as we know it. To others George offers the antidote to communism or the salvation of "capitalism." Some believe George's free trade policies to be the remedy for the world's ills, while some rationalistically find the "money question" the root of these troubles.

Again, there is no quarrel here with any single Georgist principle; the objection is to circumscribing what should be enlarged. One should dig deeply and seek to find the thread that ties all the elements into the over-all philosophy of Henry George. Upon investigation, this thread becomes more and more evident, and the superficial aspects fade as the truly essential message emerges. One discovers that Georgism is not a mundane philosophy, but a spiritual one, based upon immutable truths. George's proposals are not merely logical and expedient; their validity lies in their being just and righteous. The spiritual concept that inspires and pervades all of George is that man is born free and shall not be divested of his integrity.

This is the gist of Henry George: that neither the spirit, the mind or the body of man can rightfully be enchained, whether socially, politically or economically. It is truly a philosophy of freedom. Its strength lies in its inner force, not in its outward power. And if it seems a rather weak force to stand in a world where apparently might alone prevails, let the promise be remembered that "the meek shall inherit the earth." **GJ**

(reprinted from the Henry George News, May 1957)

Neo-Georgism

(continued from page 12)

itself Marxist. Does this indicate that Marxism has proved itself a viable system, and that the thought of George is nothing but a burned-out meteor that once briefly lit the sky of social protest and reform? Scarcely.

Marxism has not, in point of fact, demonstrated its viability as a system. It is rife with ambiguities and contradictions, both philosophical and economic, while to the extent that it may be said to have been implemented with any degree of material success, its toll in human life and freedom has been so great as to render it utterly repugnant to all but the most callous. For the effectiveness of Marxism lies neither in its cogency as an intellectual system nor in its utility as a constructive program; it lies rather in its propaganda value as a revolutionary myth — a myth with spurious but well-advertised pretensions to scientific authority and historical inevitability. It is these pretensions, providing as they do both an aureole of seeming dignity and a promise of triumph to the aspirations of the "have-nots," that give Marxism its potent appeal to the mass-minded and cause it to be embraced, at least in name, by so many of the power-seekers who pose as saviors to the "wretched of the earth." **GJ**

Skill and Knowledge

(continued from page 16)

from over-reliance on them. It is by utilizing the labor-saving powers of technology, the results of the application of knowledge, that we can — potentially, at least — free up enough time and exertion to explore acquiring skills — which can, of course, be satisfying in itself.

I suspect that if Henry George were writing today, he would see knowledge as more important than skill only for seeing civilization through a certain stage of its development (just as skill was more important in an earlier, pretechnological stage). At a later stage, though, I think George would have discovered, like modern society is discovering today, that it is only through a healthy integration of knowledge *and* skill that society can use the benefits of technological progress without falling into the trap of dehumanization and alienation. **GJ**