

Still True 100 Years Later

by EUGEN HUGO MICHAELS

IN MY studies of current social ills and their causes it struck me again how overwhelmingly similar they are to ills which Henry George set out to cure, and which he listed in the introduction to *Progress and Poverty*, such as the historic misconception regarding "the poor." The following brief excerpt is as pertinent today as it was 100 years ago:

"The tendency of what we call material progress is in nowise to improve the condition of the lower class in the essentials of healthy, happy human life. It is still further to depress the condition of the lower class. The new forces do not act upon the social fabric from underneath but strike it at a point intermediate between top and bottom.

"Those who are above the point of separation are elevated, but those who are below are crushed down. This depressing effect is not generally realized, for it is not apparent where there has long existed a class just able to live. In the progress of new settlements to the conditions of older communities it may clearly be seen that material progress does not merely fail to relieve poverty—it actually produces it.

"This question has not yet received a solution which accounts for all the facts and points to any clear and simple

remedy. Widely varying attempts show that the concurrence between those who avow the same general theories breaks up upon practical questions into an anarchy of opinion. And while professors thus disagree, the ideas that there is a necessary conflict between capital and labor, that machinery is an evil, that competition must be restrained and abolished, that wealth may be created by the issue of money, and that it is the duty of government to furnish capital or to furnish work, are rapidly making way among the great body of the people who keenly feel a hurt and are sharply conscious of a wrong.

"Such ideas, which bring great masses of men, the repositories of ultimate political power, under the leadership of charlatans and demagogues, are fraught with danger; but they cannot be successfully combatted until political economy shall give some answer consistent with all her teachings. That political economy, as at present taught, does not explain the persistence of poverty amid advancing wealth, must be due not to any inability of the science, but to some false step in its premises or overlooked factor in its estimates. I propose to beg no question, to shrink from no conclusion, but to follow truth wherever it may lead."

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The community, by its presence and activity, gives rental value to land, therefore the rent of land belongs to the community and not to the landowners. Labor and capital, by their combined efforts, produce the goods of the community—known as wealth. This wealth belongs to the producers. Justice requires that the government, representing the community, collect the rent of land for community purposes and abolish the taxation of wealth.

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