

Is It Applicable Today?

By DON S. MILLER

[Following are excerpts from an address given at the winter term completion dinner in Detroit in March. The speaker is associate dean of the College of Liberal Arts, Wayne University.]

THE Henry George philosophy is one of free enterprise and is directly opposed to all forms of socialism and communism. Many citizens of today keep shouting "free enterprise" but some of them do not really want an enterprise that is truly free. They want special privileges for themselves. They want to benefit from tariffs, patents and land monopoly.

Either the world must adopt the Henry George philosophy of a truly free and just enterprise or it must become socialistic. There are no two ways about it. I, for one, sincerely hope the United States will soon start taxing monopolies and stop the taxing of labor and capital, thus improving the conditions for all.

If monopolies were taxed high enough, those who hold them could not benefit. Such a procedure would facilitate production and mean a great saving to the consumer. The government would not have to resort to compensating taxes on industry. At present, monopolies are taxed too little; labor and capital are taxed too much. The consumer pays the bill.

Sometimes it is said that since we did not start out by taxing land monopoly, our whole system is set up so that if we started it now, it would do a great deal of harm. But we know the harm done to the monopolist would be offset by the advantages to the entire economy. Now the general idea presented by the objectors is that it is too late. But as time goes on, the greater need for natural resources increases economic pressures and there must be some kind of a blow-up as a result of these monopolies. Wars have been recurring every little while and depressions returning periodically. Now if the public started taxing those things which are monopolies, the cause for wars would not exist.

There is some question as to why the George philosophy has not acquired more standing and better acceptance. I think one reason is that the United States is a comparatively young country. In our new land of tremendous natural resources, people have had more opportunities to prosper than elsewhere because of the abundance of free land. At first people were interested in moving west and getting as much as possible of the natural resources and profiting by their exploitation. It did not seem then that there would be any problem arising from land speculation. Because land was plentiful the ultimate social results were not apparent.

I have been asked how I first became interested in this philosophy. My father was a lawyer in Chicago and subscribed to a number of periodicals, including economic journals. One of these was *The Public*, a weekly edited by Louis F. Post, who was a good friend of my father, as was John Z. White. Both had known Henry George well, and through them my father became familiar with his philosophy. There were some very prominent people who were followers of George in those days.

I studied very little economics in college and make no claim of being an economist. This is the first time in recent years that I have come in contact with a group of people interested in Henry George.