

# letter from the editor

This issue of Land&Liberty celebrates ninety years since the founding of the International Union for Land Value Taxation (the IU) in Denmark in 1926. On page 14-15 we reproduce the eloquent presidential address of Charles O'Connor Hennessy, where he says:

*The great work before us is the work of education - of enlightening the minds of men so that they may exercise political power intelligently and righteously. Over and over again Henry George pointed to the fact that the power to bring about social and political reforms rests with the masses of men in every country. If the masses of men are victims of social injustice sanctioned by law, they have the power to force their rulers to alter the law.*

There is a note of patient optimism here and throughout this address. Most significantly, there is an understanding that social change can come about only through education of the ordinary citizen. If there are injustices, these are sustained by ignorance. "When peoples, therefore, continue to suffer and submit to injustice, it is generally because ignorance or short sighted selfishness blinds them to their true political interests." He does not blame 'the system' or 'the politicians' or even 'vested interests'. These three elements are determined by the laws a people accept to be governed by, which can be reformed by common consent. The 'true political interest' of the people is to seek the common good.

This stance completely accords with Henry George. It is at once the strength and weakness of George's philosophy that its success depends entirely on the people coming to understand how the economy works, and not upon an ideology or some new system, in particular in seeing that land, labour and money are not commodities. This is a great challenge because economic thinking since the eighteenth century has failed to distinguish between these factors of production and actual commodities or wealth. Yet this basic failure has led to the notion that land may be privately owned and its benefit be appropriated solely through ownership, and that wages are a cost of production, and that money is wealth. These fundamental misconceptions distort the production of wealth and create the ever widening divide between rich and poor.

Why is it that these basic factors of economics continue to remain unseen? One reason is that, since the founding of classical economics, it has been assumed that the driving force of society is individual self-interest. We see this in Hobbes, Locke and Adam Smith. Society is conceived as a perpetual struggle of all against all, and so 'economics' is about 'competition'. It is as though this were a self-evident truth, informing economic thinking now as it did three hundred years ago. Marx is a continuation of the same with his theory of class struggle. And yet it is plain as daylight that the production of wealth is for its enjoyment.

The desire to eat does not arise through competition with one's neighbour. It is also plain as daylight that cooperation produces more than an individual can produce alone. In its simplest sense, economics is an expression of community, not competition or the war of all against all. It is primarily through the misappropriation of land value that division is introduced, where one lives off the labour of another. It is no different than slavery. The simplest solution is that each enjoys the fruits of their own labour, and none takes that of another. This means there is no natural means of obtaining unearned income. It can only ever be through legalised theft. And so there is no need for any redistribution of wealth where wealth is not misappropriated in the first place.

There is no reason for anger at economic and social injustice if the cause is general ignorance of the principles of economics, the nature of society and its relation to the earth. It belongs to the citizen in a democracy to be responsible for the condition of society. But so long as individuals see the earth and society solely in terms of their own private advantage, they are inadvertently supporting the misappropriation of the land value and all consequent injustices.

A society is not properly a society until each member acts for the common good - a truth articulated by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Aquinas, and Confucius in China. It is worth noting that the founders of classical economics, following Machiavelli, rejected this principle as 'utopian' and impractical. The rise of 'reason' in the Enlightenment corresponds with a decline in moral understanding, and a separation between reason and ethics still pervades received economic theory. Economics is conceived as having selfish ends, and society as having moral ends, each irreconcilable with the other. The consequence is economic failure and social injustice. But now we are confronted with a deeper and wider consequence of our misconceptions in climate change. The morally indifferent plunder of the earth as a mere 'resource' for consumption, rather than the home or mother of living creatures, exposes the irrationality of modern economic theory and the blindness of reducing it to mathematical formula.

After ninety years of the IU and the work of the many Georgist organizations around the world, we see that little progress has yet been made. But the conference in 1926 reminds us that the main work that needs to be done is education. Society will only change for the better when the ordinary citizen is armed with understanding and inspired by the love of justice.



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