

# Who's Reactionary Now?

By ASHLEY MITCHELL

TO TALK of security from the cradle to the grave in an insecure society, compels one to believe that under such circumstances the only security comes in the grave. Whereas, if all barriers were removed by the application of the policy of Henry George, that would throw all natural resources open to those who would use them. At the same time it would abolish the iniquitous system of taxation which will surely, unless altered, prevent the maintenance of sufficient funds to provide for social welfare. If the right road were taken, the number of real unfortunates who needed assistance, would be a very small proportion, and a just society could easily take care of them.

We are faced with a public policy of "security" based on a system of taxation which is inevitably going to destroy itself. For those funds have been raised by a system of taxation which depresses production. It will lead not to security but to insecurity, which might lead to anything. There is a danger from internal destruction; and a nation is unable to defend itself from internal forces which arise from social injustice.

Everybody should understand that it is perfectly natural that there *should* be a challenge to democracy. But one thing is very clear today, the Western democracies face a challenge to their existence, not only from external forces, but from those internal forces which are far more dangerous. Any failure to achieve a sound basis for a just society leaves the door wide open for those who would destroy the benefits of the partial freedom already secured.

In time to come Henry George, the author of *Progress and Poverty*, will be recognized as the greatest discoverer of the twentieth century in proving the direct relation between the law of wages and the law of rent. Henry George pointed the way to a just society which would not only retain the existing freedoms, but would extend them to every sphere of social life and make them completely stable.

Today we see politicians or statesmen, whichever term is preferred, putting the cart before the horse with a vengeance, in professing to establish a welfare state before attempting to discover how much welfare is needed.

One of the most pitiable spectacles today is the sight of businessmen working prodigiously in the hope of providing adequately for their families, but all the time with a powder magazine under their feet which can blow the existing conditions into atoms and wreck all the hard labors of a life time of industry.

One hundred years ago in Britain the condition of restrictions was almost precisely those existing today. All lovers of liberty were well acquainted with Buckle's *History of Civilization in England*. There he described how the people of Britain, with political patience through all the bonds of repression, had achieved a state of freedom—although only partially. It allowed the country to raise its prosperity to the state of wealth and power that made the nation a great country. The government which Britain has endured for the last five years has maintained and extended the shackles of restriction that were already put



there by their predecessors and have inflicted in addition such a condition of taxation that by all previous standards show them to be the most reactionary government of Britain in the last hundred years.

Before 1914 there was not a single protective tariff in an England which had a population of 45 million (or a third of the population of the United States in an area smaller than New York State). In 1931 there was a panic election, with land-value repeal, and the start down the slope. England became a tariff country, lost free trade, and the Conservatives themselves began the nationalism.

War came with all its regimentation—and after that the general election. There was a party which instead of realizing they should remove the barriers, instituted more. England never had more taxes than it has now. If you were to examine the records of the present party you'd say it was the most reactionary government that England has been saddled with for many years—the very opposite of 1840.

A century ago when we were struggling for freedom, businessmen of that time particularly those known as the Manchester school, did not avoid public affairs, but on the contrary were the spearhead of a movement led by Richard Cobden and John Bright, that removed the controls and repressions. [See "Wanted: Another Richard Cobden—November issue"].

It is possible to make people understand the kernel of this matter even without *Progress and Poverty*, as those men demonstrated who went the length and breadth of the country talking to audiences of all kinds. The six points which they emphasized again and again in relation to land were that it was, (1) created, (2) limited in area, (3) necessary for all human activity, (4) a value created by the community, (5) a value separate from buildings and improvements, and (6) that value could not be concealed or taken away.

Unless the businessmen in the Western democracies are animated by the same lofty sentiments which were the compelling force of those businessmen of Manchester, things are likely to move from bad to worse. Then the enemies, who are always present, will seize the opportunity to destroy democracy and abolish even the partial freedom that we now enjoy.

Georgists, in whatever they are doing, even if it does not seem like much, are doing a vital thing by telling people there is a way out. They are giving people what is the greatest need of the present time; that is a *hope in the future*.

"America is well down the road to socialism," wrote Jerome Joachim in *The Berwyn Beacon*, the newspaper which he publishes at Berwyn, Illinois. [Ashley Mitchell, speaking before an audience in the Henry George School at New York recently, consented, under pressure, to estimate that England was "two-thirds of the way down the slippery slope" and that the United States was half as far along as England].

"Will we awaken in time to save ourselves?" asks Mr. Joachim.