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Henry George and the Forgotten Man

By RAYMOND MOLEY

I WAS a youngster in Ohio (Cleveland is "my native land") in 1901-2. In a vain hope that I might improve my rhetorical capacity, I recited some of the passages from *Progress and Poverty*. My political ideal was Tom Johnson, and his ideal was Henry George. You can't take from me any of my respect for George.

There *must* be something in the name and philosophy of Henry George greater than the immediate objective, to have kept it warm and vital all these years.

I went through the campaign of 1932 when Roosevelt made the speech about the forgotten man. He got that phrase from an essay by William Graham Sumner, but what Roosevelt later meant by the forgotten man was not what Sumner meant when he wrote this:

"The Forgotten Man is delving away in patient industry, supporting his family, paying his taxes, casting his vote, supporting the church and the school, reading his newspaper, and cheering for the politician of his admiration, but he is the only one for whom there is no provision in the great scramble and the big divide . . . He works, he votes, generally he pays—but he always pays—yes, above all he pays . . . He keeps production going on . . . He is strongly patriotic . . . He gives no trouble . . . He excites no admiration . . . He is not in any way a hero . . . or a problem . . . nor notorious . . . nor an object of sentiment . . . nor a burden . . . nor the object of a job . . . nor one over whom sentimental economists and statesmen can parade their fine sentiments . . . Therefore he is forgotten."¹

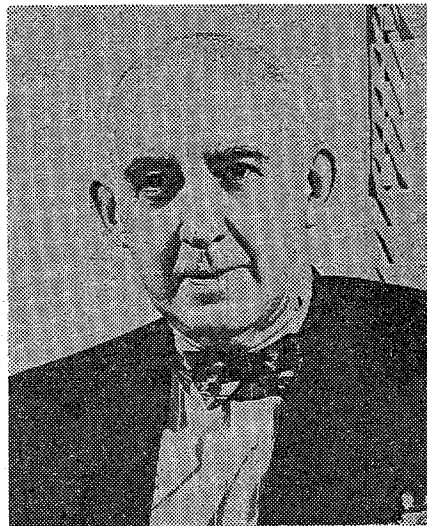
He didn't belong to a class; he might have been a farmer, a school teacher, or a shopkeeper. He was the average American, and that is the man who must be awakened in 1952.

I stayed around as long as I could, but in 1936 I decided that the administration was not the friend of this average American. The chasm had been widening and I was scared, because something was happening that was inimical to that forgotten man.

So I went down at Mr. Roosevelt's request and wrote an acceptance speech of what I thought he ought to say in 1936. Why not heal this widening breach by a uniting factor, I suggested. And he said, "fine, fine, fine."

But after the second day of the convention at Philadelphia some other fellows decided to make a fighting speech of it, with at least twenty references to class—like "economic royalist," etc. The framework of my speech was left in, but there was class against class, and not unity—not the forgotten man. That was when I walked out and never went back. Henry George rises above all of this recent disunity.

We don't need to worry in this country about tyranny in its *more repellent* forms. What we do need to worry about is tyranny in its *most seductive forms*. Alexis de Tocqueville expressed this very well when he made the following comments on the condition of American institutions in the 1830's:



"I think, then, that the species of oppression by which democratic nations are menaced is unlike anything that ever before existed in the world; our contemporaries will find no prototype of it in their memories. I seek in vain for an expression that will accurately convey the whole of the idea I have formed of it; the old words *despotism* and *tyranny* are inappropriate: the thing itself is new, and since I cannot name, I must attempt to define it.

"I seek to trace the novel features under which despotism may appear in the world. The first thing that strikes the observation is an innumerable multitude of men, all equal and alike, incessantly endeavoring to procure the petty and paltry pleasures with which they glut their lives.

"Above this race of men stands an immense and tutelary power, which takes upon itself alone to secure their gratifications and to watch over their fate. That power is absolute, minute, regular, provident, and mild . . . For their happiness such a government willingly labors, but it chooses to be the sole agent and the only arbiter of that happiness; it provides for their security, forseees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns, directs their industry, regulates the descent of property, and subdivides their inheritances . . .

" . . . Such a power does not destroy, but it prevents existence; it does not tyrannize, but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to nothing better than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd."²

Like it or not! He was describing the welfare state!

The reason I like Henry George is that he saw that coming. He was against socialism, and you can't have any compromise with socialism—because socialism is the antithesis of freedom.

I would mention four aspects of present poli-

cies that open the way to socialism in this country.

The first is the destruction of the states through the expansion of Federal power. Fifty years ago grants to the states were three million dollars. Today they are close to three billion dollars. Together with this increase has gone a steady stealing by the Federal government of the tax resources of the state and local governments. Socialism, in order to prevail, must become national and the elimination of the authority of the states is an essential part of its invasion.

The second means by which socialism attains its hold is through the destruction of the savings of the people. In seven years, the real savings of the American people have gone down 23 per cent. Thus in something like another twenty-five years at that rate, the savings of the people will be gone and Government will be the sole means of security.

The third method is through the expropriation of income. I hardly need to tell you how devastating the march of the income tax has been. The Sixteenth Amendment is one of the greatest enemies of private property ever devised.

Finally there is the danger of the tyranny of the executive. The President has given us an example of that in his seizure of the steel mills.

Thus the "four horsemen of socialism" are riding in our Federal Administration. An especially important aspect of present conditions is the emphasis placed by political parties upon materialism and material gains. This means that our politicians and many of our leaders are eliminating ethics as a basis of economic life. Here again Henry George raised a warning hand long ago.

But you can't have Karl Marx and Henry George, too. You can't have a little bit of Marx and a little bit of George—because they don't mix. We're fighting for traditional values in this country. Some people ask where we want to be a hundred years from now. I think what matters is the direction in which we're going. If we know we're not selling our birthright we don't have to worry about where we're going to be.

That direction would be away from the tyranny of the state. Give men freedom and they'll find their way. Remember *there is a God!* One of the greatest exponents of the philosophy of Henry George is John C. Lincoln. He has written a book about Christ³, showing how we must get back to the fundamentally ethical basis of economics.

Unless economics has an ethical basis, then economics is a false guide, and ultimately a tyrannous master.

1. William Graham Sumner: *The Forgotten Man and Other Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press; 1918).

2. Alexis de Tocqueville: *Democracy in America* (New York, Alfred A. Knopf; 1945).

3. *Christ's Object in Life* by John C. Lincoln (Henry George School, New York, 1948).