

Capturing the College Student Ferment

by WILLIAM W. NEWCOMB

Delivered at the Henry George School Conference,
Miami Beach, July 7, 1968

ALMOST a hundred years have gone by and dedicated Georgists have gone to their graves hoping that their sons and daughters would see some tiny awareness among the economists and the politicians that land value taxation must be instituted if the nation's economy is to be saved.

Many Georgist organizations have fought valiantly through those years to bring this awareness to the right people—but still the college economists avoid the issue, the statesmen are not about to commit political suicide, and the more mature students in our universities stage demonstrations throughout the world in their own frustrations against a corrupt society. And the poor built a City of Hope at the doorsteps of the Capitol: Not being able to move the staid Congress through the usual behind-the-doors lobbyist means of the Establishment corporations, they resorted to demeaning demonstrations.

The college students have been very articulate this past five years in voicing their protest against the Establishment. Beginning at Berkeley, their bodily protest has spread throughout campuses in the United States and on to the Sorbonne in France, to Italy, to Germany, to Belgium, even to Britain.

Aside from the fact that the students are asking for a restructuring of their courses on a more meaningful basis, the students are groping for the right onslaught on the Establishment. They call themselves the New Left. Their aim has a Marxian slant as has been almost all reform legislation since New Deal days.

A significant conference was held at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, in Santa Barbara,

California in August 1967. This center is headed by Robert Hutchins and is financed by the Fund for the Republic, a Ford Foundation philanthropy.

There were 22 students, many of them student body presidents, some of them college newspaper or magazine editors. They came from large, well-known universities as well as from a few smaller colleges.

The mood of the conference was hammering discontent, combined with impatience for action. The participants looked on their country and found it filled with hopeless contradictions, hypocrisy and wrongdoings. They were unimpressed by gifts of food, industrialization or military aid or the other benevolences of the United States outside its borders, except perhaps in the Peace Corps. They saw only a new imperialism promoted by the weapons-industrial complex in Vietnam.

The students saw stability and decency draining out of their worlds. They saw themselves as advance agents of a severely troubled national and international order they are soon to inherit. The gap between their affluent money-grabbing parents and their own moral values is almost unbridgeable. The failure in Vietnam, the ghetto, and the vast unfed in the sub-continents troubled them deeply.

Frederick Richmond, a student from New York University had this to say: "Over half the country is under 25 as of this year; by 1970, the majority will be under 21. In the next year's presidential election, the median age of the American voter will be 27. In 1972, it will be even lower."

Small wonder that Presidential can-

didates Kennedy and McCarthy engaged a "children's crusade" to build their candidacies. Youth is going to ask forcefully for the right of enfranchisement at age 18 or 19, and Congress is going to resist because of the radicalism of youth.

Mr. Richmond makes another telling point: "We are approaching the point, if we have not already reached it, where the number of people on youth's side actively engaged in trying to change society, will be greater than on the adults trying to maintain it. There are more than 6 million students in colleges and universities today. If 98% are silent, and only 2% are "active", that makes 120,000 activists.

"The university traditionally was conceived as an institution withdrawn from society in which men might engage in independent critical learning and thought. In the last 30 years the university has been transformed from an elite institution to one now attended by most American young people: the university experience has changed from one primarily for upper class children and budding intellectuals to one which incorporates most sectors of society. The University has become less a community of scholars and more a puberty rite and requirement for one's job resume.

"The end of a college education ought not to be to create eggheads, but to create people who can contribute actively to the achievement of a humane society. The first goal of the university ought to be the involvement of students in society."

When I went to the University of Rochester some 40 years ago, I took very much to heart what the university catalogue said, "that matriculation at the University was a privilege and not a right" and that as a student we were to act accordingly.

Whether my alma mater still has this paragraph, I don't know, but I noticed in my Alumni Review for Spring 1968 pictures of two sit-ins: November 1967 protesting against the Dow Chemical Company and again in February 1968.

And the Dean of my university's College of Arts and Science, Kenneth E. Clark says: "In the light of recent events on campus, it is hard to believe that our students today are the same students they were at the beginning of the Fall Semester. They came to the Campus knowing more subject matter than any prior student groups . . . They behave differently. They seem to be taking the administrators and faculty as targets . . . and they want new results from the University. Students read the newspapers from other colleges, they communicate through the National Students Association, they are influenced by the actions and the campaigns of organizations such as The Students for a Democratic Society. Some of the national student groups make plans prior to the academic year for the particular programs they will work on during that year and operate quite effectively to help carry out those programs."

Henry Steele Commager, renowned American historian, in a long article that first appeared in Newsday, and later in the Miami Herald, said, among other things: "What disturbs students most deeply, are public rather than private wrongs.

"While students feel there is an irrelevance in much that is taught at the universities, and they are unhappy about having graduate students for their instructors while full-time professors are often on the research payroll of government or business.

"Students are alienated by the spectacle of the deep inequalities in a society dedicated to equality, and they

are convinced that the Academy shares responsibility for creating and perpetuating these inequalities. Both John Gardner and President Wallis of the University of Rochester have noted that universities are at the beck and call of government agencies, particularly the military."

With this deep desire by students for a moral approach to the inequities of the system, there is a need to channel student thought to land value taxation. First, of course, there should be every effort possible that those young people who have attended courses in the Henry George schools should be directed to the universities for advance study and to challenge the economic courses offered at the colleges. In most cases, as it has been repeatedly shown by Professor Harry Gunnison Brown and his wife, Elizabeth Reed Brown, the thesis of Henry George is given scant attention. In their booklets "The Effective Answer to Communism" and "How College Textbooks Treat Land Value Taxation," not only is it indicated that the typical college professor is guilty of economic illiteracy, but shows downright chauvinism—he honestly believes that the speculator has every right to bleed the last dollar of profit from the unearned increment.

For example: In an economic text published in 1937, entitled *Getting and Earning*, Professor Ralph H. Blodgett and Raymond T. Bye say: "According to our criteria only that income is earned which is paid to the recipient for a socially useful service rendered in production at a price not to exceed the normal competitive value of the service. On the basis of this definition, the rent of land is unearned increment."

In 1955, Professor Blodgett (writing without co-author Bye this time) said: "A number of ethical and practical obstacles would stand in the way of a program for socializing economic

rent." In the preface to this later book, *Our Expanding Economy*, he offers no other clue for his change of mind since 1937. Except in the preface to the 1955 book, he indicates that he fears some may approach his later book with hostility or prejudice because of his earlier view.

Professor Harry G. Brown tells me that there has never been, from 1909 to this date, any presentation of the case for increased land value taxation in any talk, any paper or any article in any meeting of the American Economic Review. I have wondered whether this total silence in the American Economic Review means that Economic professors are bribed by gifts of land. Professor Brown says they may fear not getting tenure; or are concerned about getting promotions.

The Robert Schalkenbach Foundation has been doing yeoman service through its economics counselor, Weld S. Carter. It would appear that the Committee on Taxation, Resources and Economic Development, under his guidance, which meets each year at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee under the financial sponsorship of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation is making some headway in the promulgation of views directed to the state legislatures and to the tax assessors. We can hope that the Luce publications, which have proselyted land value taxation in the past, will give wider circulation to the conference papers so that politicians will be influenced.

Uppermost in my mind is the need to direct more and more of our attention to the dissident students—that 2% that Frederick Richmond of New York University said was so important in his paper delivered at the Center for Study of Democratic Institutions.

Why is it important to capture the college student's attention, when he is in college only temporarily?

(1) The college student is studyminded. Most of the day he is occupied with studying for classes and performing in them.

(2) The college student is not job-worried. He is not usually supporting a family, and therefore is not inhibited by lack of conformity to the mold.

(3) The college student is angry. He wants reform. In fact, while in college he wants reform NOW. But he knows not what—he is a rebel without direction. He is marked by impatience, and often does violent things because of his impatience, as witness Berkeley and the Free Speech Movement and Columbia and the students' support of Negro housing vs. Columbia's continued encroachment of Harlem.

(4) The college student is full of healthy vigor. His mind and his strong young body are in full coordination. He takes to the ramparts exposing his body to Establishment counter-attack because his anger cannot be contained.

(5) It has been established by Henry Steele Commanger and by others that students who are economic rebels in college often carry their rebellion into their middle years — in clubs, political activities, causes they support, etc.

But many college students have pursued the right of vigorous petition without violence:

(1) In May 1961, the Students Association for Constructive Taxation at Reed College, Portland, Oregon, picketed a vacant lot. In their press release, and their letter to the Mayor, Terry Schrunk, of Portland, Oregon, the students claimed that lot, along with 10,000 other lots in Portland and 13,000 in other parts of the United States were under-taxed.

(2) In Liverpool, in 1963-65, the British Student Christian Movement organized a national student conference on housing. Liverpool has had, for hundreds of years, one of the worse, all-time records of disease and death through bad housing in all the western world. A move was started to alleviate this.

(3) In Morristown, New Jersey, seven women and two men took up residence in a black ghetto, and despite the opposition of the local Methodist Church (but with the cooperation of the national office), brought significant white establishment aid to the ghetto community.

(4) In Australia, the Student Christian Movement, after a 10-year campaign, was able to get Australia to lower its color bar to Asiatics and other non-whites.

Students feeling a great frustration at the immoral world about them, join two quite sizable organizations while in College, National Student Association and the leftist Student for Democratic Society. These two organizations need a heavy infiltration by students who have been properly educated in land value taxation in the colleges.

However, if there is a tendency among economic professors to downgrade land value taxation because of fear of loss of tenure or loss of promotion, it is imperative that chairs in Land Value Taxation be established.

I believe there is a source of money for these chairs in the foundations. With all due respect to the fact that these foundations were often set up with land-monopoly funds, I believe fund raisers can tap this fount.

But a far lower cost method can be utilized immediately to increase the number of activist students attending Henry George Schools, and this same method will encourage them to pursue the three basic courses:

(1) I propose that students be offered a partial scholarship of, say, \$500 to any college they choose, on the condition they take a course in economics at college at an early date.

(2) I propose that this partial scholarship be offered only to students of college age.

(3) I propose that a campaign be conducted immediately among dedicated Georgists in the hope of getting at least 100 Georgists to contribute a minimum of \$100 each toward this scholarship fund. This will provide \$10,000 as a starter. My \$100 is herewith pledged.

Twenty Georgist-oriented students in 20 economic courses on 20 campuses on a \$10,000 fund can create quite a ruckus! I know I created a ruckus in my economics class at the university 40 years ago when the professor gave me an A for my term paper on land value taxation, even though his course was completely removed from the Georgist thesis.

In 1883, an obscure German refugee writer died in a London slum. The writer was Karl Marx and the friend who supported him over the years was Friedrich Engels, son of a wealthy industrialist. Certainly no "prophet" died a more complete failure. Twenty years later in 1903, which was just 65 years ago, Lenin launched his Bolshevik revolution with 17 supporters.

In 30 AD a Gallilean carpenter was crucified at Jerusalem by the Roman governor to appease the populace. He

had 12 disciples. Despite the most systematic persecution, the church which built upon these 12 became the official religion of the Roman Empire. The teachings of this man Jesus spread far beyond the frontiers of the then civilized world.

In 632 AD an illiterate Arabian camel driver died. Ten years before he had escaped from Mecca when his neighbors refused to listen to his new religion. This would-be prophet, Mohammed, was received with enthusiasm away from home, and lived to see his new faith triumphant in Arabia. Within his lifetime the followers of the prophet had won more territory than Rome at its height.

And so may the New Economics of Henry George also come — even to a sophisticated 20th century people.

I remember, back in 1939, when Frank Chodorov was director of the Henry George School at the old 29th Street location, and he and I were roommates at 30th Street, just around the corner. And in one of the bull sessions late into the evening, over the coffee cups in the snack room, Frank said: "The purpose of my work here is to make it no longer necessary for the job — and that it be liquidated. But to liquidate the need for the Henry George Schools, there will have to come some Messiah like Father McGlynn."

Maybe among that 2% of activists a Father McGlynn will be a student rebel at Berkeley, Columbia, or Rochester—who knows!

Ocean Wealth

(Continued from page 1)

Week, "The part that is most controversial is that Malta wants to give the needs of poor countries preference if any financial benefit comes from exploiting underseas resources."¹

In a world geared to profit-making

but compelled into aid-giving what light does the Henry George theory throw on this matter? It is assumed that the crux of the George idea is that the life, liberty and pursuit of happiness theme of the Declaration of Independence is contravened when "the equal right to land—on which and by which man alone can live—is denied.