

# Signs of Progress

## Georgeist Activities Throughout the World

### Robert Schalkenbach Foundation

REPORT OF V. G. PETERSON, SECRETARY

Can we spread an understanding of Henry George in college classrooms? After eight weeks in the field, I am prepared to say that we can, if we work along established lines. Professors are not missionaries, and we must not expect them to act that part. They will, however, present the subject in what they consider a fair manner, and they will distribute to their students literature which they feel is pertinent, provided the subject is honestly presented and is free from propaganda.

During July and August I toured the country on behalf of the Foundation's college work. My trip covered 7,500 miles. I visited 35 colleges and had interviews with 126 professors. To each of these men I sent literature suited to the specific work in which he will engage this term. I am confident that in most of the institutions I visited George will receive a better hearing.

In the Principles of Economics courses, George's Law of Rent is widely discussed in almost every college. However, a check of the libraries discloses that only a small number of students take the book out for study. A pamphlet containing George's chapters on rent is now being prepared by the Foundation, and will be supplied to the professors teaching the "Principles" courses. The professor will cooperate in the distribution of this pamphlet because he wants these chapters read. Similarly, in the "History of Economic Thought" courses where George is considered quite thoroughly, a pamphlet can be designed to fit the course's own requirements, and cooperation in its distribution is assured. In the Labor courses, I found that "The Condition of Labor" has a special appeal. One well known professor whose books on labor problems are widely read, told me that for years he has required his students to read George's answer to Pope Leo XIII. I used this testimonial with good results when talking to men giving similar courses in other colleges. This is another pamphlet we can print for classroom circulation.

Suppose we print this literature and the professors give it to their students. Will it lead to a study of the whole philosophy? I predict that it will have important results. "Get a bright young chap interested in George," one professor said to me, "and he gives the class and himself no rest—they certainly 'put their teeth into it.'"

I found friends in unexpected places. In a teacher's college in the Northwest, for instance, I discovered a framed picture of Henry George hanging in the office of the Eco-

nomics Department and discovered that the Head of the Department is devoting four sessions of each course to "Progress and Poverty," and is circulating a dozen copies of the book, which he keeps in his own library. In Seattle I found a professor who took his doctor's degree at Princeton where copies of George's masterpiece were offered to the students for fifty-five cents a copy. His purchase of a copy had resulted in a close and convincing study. He is now following Princeton's example in his own domain.

George gets some mention in the Sociology Department, though the use of his books there is not extensive. I found one enthusiast in Chicago who hails George's discovery of the relationship between poverty and progress as an important contribution, and insists that his students study sections of "Progress and Poverty" as part of their term's work. He told me, with much satisfaction, of a young woman who had found George particularly difficult, but who later returned to tell him that she had finally mastered the book, read others in the set, and enrolled for a course with the Henry George School in that City. "I think," the professor said, "you'd say I'd made a Single Taxer."

An essay contest for college students has already been suggested in LAND AND FREEDOM's columns. I asked the opinion of many of the men to whom I talked, and they endorsed it as a workable plan. The prize, they advised, should be cash or a scholarship. Such a contest requires careful selection of topic, a competent Board of Judges and proper publicity. It will take time to work out these details, but I think it very probable that we shall undertake it very soon. Your suggestions will help us—let us hear from you.

One of my most interesting interviews was with Professor John R. Commons who, until his retirement ten years ago, was an important member of the faculty of the University of Wisconsin. I sought an audience with Dr. Commons because of his long fight to bring about the taxation of land values in the State of Wisconsin. Dr. Commons is eighty-six and while he shows his age and must rely upon a cane, his mind is clear and keen. I think you will enjoy reading part of the report I made after my talk with Dr. Commons:

"Dr. Commons said we will never get George taught in the colleges by trying to force respect for his ideas alone. We must do it by proof that it works. Urged research and publication of reports of result of same. Said Pittsburgh-Scranton plan should be analyzed carefully and report issued on its accomplishments and defects. Said the Grimstead Bill which he supported in 1921 should be analyzed and report of its aims and purposes issued. Said farmers had been in

favor of Grimstead Bill, but he could not get any support, financially or otherwise, to put the measure through.

"Dr. Commons differs from George in this: He believes we may need other taxes (income) and should not limit ourselves to one tax. He believes land should be taxed only on site value; that its natural fertility should not enter into it at all. Would exempt from taxation all improvements, irrigation, forestry, etc. Would have a soil expert on every State Tax Commission Board. Said the fertility of the soil can be measured as accurately as a yard of cloth. Said this fertility was no use unless labor was applied to it and was part of the 'Divine Providence Theory' which Adam Smith and others, as well as George, believed in. As far as taxing incomes is concerned, he would tax quality, not quantity. That is, he would break income down into that derived from monopoly, privilege and land speculation, and tax that, exempting all income derived from human labor (salaries, wages).

"He said he read 'Progress and Poverty' in 1881, right after it was first issued. It was that and only that book that started him as an economist instead of a journalist, the career he had decided upon. He considers 'Progress and Poverty' the greatest book on economics ever written, and the most widely read, with the possible exception of Adam Smith's 'Wealth of Nations.'

"His admiration and respect for Mr. Purdy is great. He said, 'Purdy and I could have accomplished something in land reform if we could have got together—he knows the city problems, I know the farm problem.' I told Dr. Commons about Mr. Purdy's separation of land and improvement taxes, and his land value maps. He said, 'Purdy is a rare man.'"

Besides visiting the colleges, which were, of course, my main assignment, I had the great pleasure of meeting scores of friends with whom the Foundation has corresponded for many years. Their hospitality will always live in my memory. They told me about what they were doing, and questioned me eagerly about activities in New York. I left each regretfully, for in each I found a friend.