

Let's Consider Tax Reform

By CHARLES JOHNSON POST

THERE is an easy appeal in the philosophy of Henry George that has an almost mystical allurements to many minds. But there is more than an abstract appeal for a sentimental—or a sentimentalizing—humanity.

There is a cold-blooded power of analysis and a clear-cut structure of realistic logic that perhaps sometimes has been obscured by the emotions inspired by his superb rhetoric. He spread out a great and basic philosophy based upon the realisms of history and high human reasoning. And then he went further—he showed what must be done in order to bring forth a living birth for a sound order in human society. Sometimes this is overlooked in the passion for poetic abstractions. His will and testament leaves to the sincerity of us of today and generations to come, these words which should be branded in the minds of Georgists:

"But the real of the propagandist needs to be supplemented by the skill of the politician. While the one need not fear to arouse opposition, the other should seek to minimize resistance. The political art, like the military art, consists in marshing the great force against the point of least resistance; and, to bring a principle most quickly and effectively into practical politics, the measure which presents it should be so moderate while involving the principle as to secure the largest support and excite the least resistance."

Never, in so brief a paragraph, has there been condensed the art of propaganda campaigning and the mechanism of human progress.

Henry George was no abstract, closet philosopher—and not because he spoke from trucks in the open air, come wind or rain. He was no shy theoretician peeling timidly from behind closed blinds at a rude world. He knew the world was crude and rough—he had lived among it on equal, or less than equal terms. He boldly laid down great theories and great principles. And then—a master of theory and analysis and a master of realism as well—he set forth the principles of human persuasion and the basic laws by which human progress is achieved in a democracy, through political approach and development. He took the definition of politics: i. e., energies pertaining to the state or its government, and rejected the artificial one so popular with the too pure in heart. Beyond the terms of a high economic civilization George envisioned economic democracy and social justice through the realistic approach of politics and political mechanisms. He was no pleasantly dis-

cursive and idealizing dreamer as his enemies contemptuously would have him.

Hearken to Henry George again: *"To those who have never studied the subject, it will seem ridiculous to propose as the greatest and more far-reaching of all reforms a mere fiscal change."*

A mere fiscal change!

It is reasonable to believe that the author did know that "a mere fiscal change" could be brought about. Did he not believe in democracy as the highest form of human association yet achieved? Is it reasonable to think that he had merely a highly ethical cult in mind? Or that cultural immurement was the expression of human achievement?

Henry George did not leave behind him an ethereal fabric of sociological sympathies. He left behind him a battle. He furnished keen, penetrating and social insight into the problems and poverties of this somewhat crudely organized society that we call civilization. It was the philosophical and superbly logical mind of George himself who saw the vast potential that stretched to the horizon of the future. And he said it would and could come about by "a mere fiscal change."

But how does tax reform come about? Is there any other way except through politics? There is no Santa Claus for civilization and democracy; we have to work it out through realisms realistically seen and realistically approached.

We do not need mere philosophers—they happen but rarely. We need tax reformers. Not sociologists. George was that for all time. For it is a philosophy that is inert unless it can be conceived and born in tax reform.

Nor did George mean that political astuteness was solely to be expressed in founding a brand-new political party—he was too able a political historian to think that. He meant, clearly, by his reference to politics, the political weight that lies in public sentiment—the power that lies in public opinion, organized, propagandized and proselytized public opinion. He meant the realistic, concrete weight of the human mind expressing itself through the political channels that are the fibre of a democratic government and a democratic-minded people.

As to politics, in the current vernacular, it is not simply the art of running for office, or solemnly pointing a party label that nobody reads and fewer vote. A candidacy is simply a detail—often trivial—and any label may do; look at New England and Vermont where New Deal Republicans swept the Democratic Roosevelt into office! Politics is the art of influencing minds, and of weighing measures and appeals so that they involve the principle, and are so moderate as to secure the largest support and excite the least resistance. And the seed has to be sown before one can walk into a convention or a legislature with even the most righteous dream under one's arm.

Politics is real, politics is earnest! It is difficult to see the sincerity that proclaims Georgism and votes standpat Republican or standpat Democrat—or that votes not at all in a factious protest against the coarse realisms of poli-

"Henry George was not merely a tax reformer," says the author of this article, "but his followers should be." This is another plea for realism and less theorizing, with particular emphasis on politics and labor. Rupert Mason, writing about Mr. Post's former article, said, heartily agree that "we must be a living part of the issues and for of our own day."

tics in general. Sincerity consists in ceasing ourselves with issues that exist, and with adversaries we must face, and with the that we must need; even though the never can see the horizons with us.

With Henry George there was recognition of the fact that there are great surges and movements in the mass mind of humanity—are having such an era now. To ride with to shape them—even though slightly given moment—George, like Cromwell that prayer and tactics go hand in hand.

To George politics meant the art of ing friends and allies in such days, dynamic and not statically, and to present a front for the little steps by which civilization goes forward. Today the mind of man sensitive to injustice. He has a sense of ethics which has aspiration but neither lary nor logic. This new social force is gradually becoming articulate.

To the Republican Party and the cratic Party has been added a new potent bar is on the march—for what? Higher—better living—a larger share in the sunlight? Yet their march is to the more definite class-consciousness played to the tunes extracted from the complicated of Karl Marx. Marx now seems easy to stand; Henry George is difficult. To answer lies in higher wages—and their have brought higher wages. Q. E. D. The scratched an itch for momentary relief; wages, in the brief time, have not in. The answer is academic, and correct. But such an academic verity as an excuse saulting organized labor is to defy the sense and the morality of George.

It is true that there are racketeers in labor unions. But there are also racketeers in politics—both parties. Organized labor different from any other form of organization—it is exposed to the same per of crooks, racketeers, dreamers and ide is the human mass as a whole. The organized labor are only sincere, or u died, when they come from open labor who do not object to servitude so long on a low wage basis. There is, of course, derful allurements in being against the "eternity" of labor; it makes even the h of us, in such moments of contentment ness, feel so much better than our fel the human menagerie! We are brief, reasoning, aristocrats.

What would George have said? Or if Or done?

Henry George is still great reading a oughtly recommended to all Georgists.

A Free Banking System

can savings. Full ground rent must be collected, in lieu of taxes on production, so that everyone may work as he wishes and receive the full product of his labor, thus automatically insuring a stable price index. Bank failures, furthermore, would then no longer result from a general business depression. While George did not discuss banking, as distinct from other business, we can see that by applying his principles to all business, he pointed the way to a competitive banking system, free of government interference and favoritism, and capable of serving the community at cost.